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Upcoming Events

Golden Eagle Cup Debate &
Oral Interp at Aberdeen Central

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Groton Prairie Mixed League

Team Standings: Shih Tzus 3, Coyotes 3, Chipmunks 3, Jackelopes 1, Cheetahs 1, Foxes 1

Men's High Games: Ron Belden 236, Randy Stanley 213, Brad Waage 194

Women's High Games: Nicole Kassube 196, Darci Spanier 193, Karen Spanier 172

Men's High Series: Ron Belden 537, Randy Stanley 518, Lance Frohling 501

Women's High Series: Nicole Kassube 487, Darci Spanier 429, Karen Spanier 422

Conde National League

Nov. 1 Team Standings: Mets 21, Tigers 18, Pirates 17, Braves 14, Giants 13, Cubs 13

Men's High Games: Tony Waage 223, Russ Bethke 209, Ryan Bethke 202

Men's High Series: Ryan Bethke 531, Tony Waage 524, Russ Bethke 481

Women's High Games: Sam Bahr 185, Vickie Kramp 166, Nancy Radke 154

Women's High Series: Vickie Kramp 451, Sam Bahr 447, Joyce Walter 414

Oct. 25 Team Standings: Mets 19, Tigers 17, Pirates 16, Giants 11, Braves 11, Cubs 10

Men's High Games: Ryan Bethke 208, 193; Joe Groblinhoff 187; John Lowery 172

Men's High Series: Ryan Bethke 562, Joe Groblinhoff 509, Tony Waage 451

Women's High Games: Michelle Johnson 182; Vickie Kramp 170, 169; Sam Bahr 162

Women's High Series: Vickie Kramp 479, Michelle Johnson 462, Sam Bahr 424

Redfield ends Groton's playoff advancement

Groton Area played its first five-set match of the season Thursday night with Redfield winning the match, 3-2. It was the second round of the region playoffs and it was played in Henry.

Redfield won the first set, 25-22. Groton Area led for most of the set, having a 17-10 lead. The Pheasants tied the set at 21 and outscored Groton Area, 4-1, to win.

Groton Area won the second set, 25-17. Groton Area led for most of the set. Redfield tied the set at 15 and took a 16-15 lead, but the Tigers would go on a nine-point run and would go on to win, 25-17.

Groton Area won the third set, 25-20. The set was tied nine times and there were six lead changes. Groton area had a nine-point rally to take a 19-11 lead. The Pheasants closed to within one, 21-20, but Groton Area would score the final four points for the win.

The fourth set was tied three times with one lead change in the early goings before Groton Area got the upper hand and had a 16-9 lead. Redfield would tie the set at 17 and 18 and had a six point run down the stretch to win, 25-19.

Redfield jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the fifth set, but Groton Area came back to tie it at four and would take a 5-4 lead. But then the score got stuck at five for Groton Area and the Pheasants would score nine unanswered points to take a 13-5 lead and would go on to win, 15-7.

Madeline Flihs had 14 kills, two ace serves, one block and 13 digs to lead the Tigers. Aspen Johnson had 12 kills, four blocks and five digs. Anna Fjeldheim had eight kills, one ace serve and four digs. Sydney Leicht had eight kills, three ace serves, 24 digs and one block. Maddie Bjerke had two kills and five digs. Elizabeth Flihs had one kill, 36 sets and 23 digs. Alyssa Thaler had 31 digs. Trista Keith had 14 digs. Allyssa Locke had six digs.

The match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, with a special internet purchase through ITC, sponsored by Lori's Pharmacy, Blocker Construction, Groton Legion Post #39, S & S Lumber, Groton Chiropractic, John Sieh Agency, Mike-N-Jo's Body-N-Glass, Dacotah Bank, Marty Weismantel Insurance Agency, Bierman Farm Service, Allied Climate Professionals, Bary Keith at Harr Motors and BK Custom T's & More.

#483 in a series Covid-19 Update: by Marie Miller

I didn't really want to be posting this often at this point in events, but I also note these Updates can get to be too long if I wait. As a result, here we are a couple of days early. We seem to have our numbers moving downward again, and that's helpful. The seven-day new-case average is down to 71,610 with the case total up to 46,220,296. Hospitalizations are down to 48,612.

Colorado's in trouble again with cases at levels not seen since their pandemic peak last November. Hospitalizations are rising in pace with the new cases. Many hospitals report they are over 90 percent of capacity, some over 100 percent; there are severe staffing shortages; and they are now permitted to redirect incoming patients to other institutions as needed. True to the pattern across the country, most of the hospitalized have not been vaccinated. The state is in a bad neighborhood too: Arizona and New Mexico are also reporting increasing case numbers.

The seven-day deaths average is at 1257 with a total that has gone over three-quarters of a million at 750,077. If Americans who've died of Covid-19 were a state, it wouldn't be the smallest one; there would be three smaller; this "state" would also be larger than the District of Columbia. That's pretty eye-popping, especially considering we're continuing to lose 1000+ Americans every day, most of them people who didn't choose to receive the vaccine. Let's think about that.

After Tuesday's CDC clearance of the pediatric doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine for the 5 to 11 age group, vaccinations got underway on Wednesday morning with many clinics intending to continue vaccination right through the weekend. Availability appears to have been spotty across the country; many parents I know in our region searched for doses on Wednesday, but couldn't find any until late in the week or even this upcoming week; on the other hand, those in larger cities and other parts of the country had no trouble accessing the vaccine. We know many parents are going to elect to leave their young children unvaccinated, but this mad rush will likely go on until the pent-up demand is met. To be clear, there is plenty of pediatric vaccine available; it's a matter of getting it out to people.

I've had questions why these pediatric doses come in their own packaging instead of just using the same vials as for adults and administering one-third as much of the vaccine to get the lower pediatric dose. That's a good question which was discussed at Tuesday's CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) meeting, but Tuesday's Update was long enough, so I didn't address it then. Here's the answer.

There are actually two factors operating here. The first one is that it is very difficult to accurately draw up tiny volumes of vaccine into a syringe. The dose for adults is quite a small one as it is; taking just one-third of that would really complicate things. So this pediatric vaccine is diluted differently when the vial is prepared for use so that the volume needed is larger. (Many vaccines require dilution before use.) Once that's done, it would be important to know which vials are diluted for adult use and which are diluted for pediatric use to be sure you're giving the right dose to the right person; so the vials are color-coded to make them easy to tell apart at a glance.

The second reason is that the formulation of this pediatric vaccine is slightly different from the formulation of the adult vaccine. These vaccines contain something called a buffer, a substance that helps maintain a stable pH (level of acidity/alkalinity). This is important because the active ingredient, mRNA with its lipid carriers, is very sensitive to pH changes. The buffer used in the adult vaccine, phosphate-buffered saline, doesn't do as good a job at maintaining pH in the long term; this is one reason the shelf-life for the vac-

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cine is so short. The pediatric formulation uses a different buffer, tromethamine, which keeps the vaccine stable for up to 10 weeks under standard refrigeration. That's a big help. Since the buffer isn't an active ingredient, it has no effect on efficacy or safety, only on shelf-life. It looks like there are plans to begin making the adult formulation with this different buffer too; at least for a while, there will be some adult doses circulating with each of these buffers.

I am of the generation who began life in a world plagued by poliomyelitis caused by that virus which produces infections with effects ranging from you-don't-know-you-have-it to loss of the use of your lower limbs to permanent respiratory paralysis necessitating breathing assistance for the rest of your life. I grew up with news images of rows of kids (and some adults) lined up in iron lungs, unable to get up and walk and participate fully in much of what life has to offer because to leave the iron lung was to die. I was too young to apprehend at the time the fear and desperation my parents and their contemporaries must have felt as they watched children around them sicken and suffer—and sometimes die; but I can imagine now how it was for them. I can also imagine what a miracle that first vaccine must have seemed to them. I didn't think much of the whole needle-in-the-arm thing at the time, but my mom was a fan. I get that now. I also remember in about the sixth grade lining up in the school gym to swallow a tasty sugar cube with a drop or two of a colorful liquid embedded, all served up in these cute little paper cups—the new, better version of the polio vaccine, one I found vastly preferable to the whole needle thing. I remember, too, wondering why all vaccines weren't offered in such a tempting package; I was an adult studying microbiology in college before I had the answer to that one.

Thing is, as scary as this was, polio only kills, at worst, maybe a quarter of a percent of the kids infected—that's one in 400 on the high end. The vast majority of them never develop spinal cord disease, and their recovery is complete. Those who develop spinal polio might recover; if nerve cells aren't completely destroyed, there's a chance they'll return to full function. If some neurons are destroyed, there's a chance the remaining ones will take over their function and the resulting disability isn't too noticeable. Senator Mitch McConnell is an example of a person like that, and he's had what he would term a productive life since he had polio at the age of 2. In 2019, there were just 140 cases of polio worldwide, a 99.99 percent decline from 1988, just 33 years ago. That transformation was brought about almost entirely by vaccination. This is relevant, I think, because we find ourselves today in a situation that carries some shadows of that history.

I don't usually interject my own personal circumstances into these Updates, mostly because I don't figure my life is all that fascinating to folks who've never met me (and probably also to many who have, truth be told); but I'm going to mention tonight that on Wednesday—that's right, first day out—two small people who are very important to me started their path to vaccinated status by receiving a first dose of the pediatric Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine. Both are between 5 and 11, and I couldn't be more delighted for them and their long-suffering parents who have been feeling much as my parents must have felt way back in the 1950s. I bring this up because I suspect there are a whole lot of people who, even if they're vaccinated themselves, will hesitate to vaccinate their kids. And I'm not sure why: We vaccinate our kids against all kinds of diseases these days and just a year or so ago, we mostly agreed this is a highly desirable state of affairs.

Many parents are calculating that their child's chance of becoming very ill from Covid-19 is small. And they're right. But the thing is some kids get really sick, some are hospitalized, and a few die. There have been something more than 8300 kids aged 5 to 11 who have been hospitalized with this virus (more than 65,000 from 0 to 17); that number has skyrocketed this past summer. Over 5200 have had severe disease or that multisystem inflammatory syndrome, which is scary as hell. Some end up on vents or, worse, using extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO), supposing it's available in a hospital you

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can get your kid into. A third or so of hospitalized kids had no risk factors for severe disease. We know at least 791 kids have died; and you can say what you want about percentages, when one dies, he's 100 percent dead. Covid-19 is the 8th highest killer of kids aged 5 to 11 in the last year, and it is now a vaccine-preventable disease. I'm having trouble figuring out why any parent would just take their kid's chances with a vaccine-preventable disease. If that was my kid, I wouldn't roll the dice on this one, just as my parents didn't do it when I was that kid.

This pediatric formulation is a small dose. We have the data to show this dose elicits a highly effective immune response in the age group, and the lower dose reduces the odds of an adverse reaction by a lot. We know it works; the clinical trials in the 5 to 11 age group make that apparent, and the real-world data on 12-to-17-year-olds who have been receiving vaccine for a while now show hospitalization rates ten times as high in the unvaccinated population as in the vaccinated one. There have been few side effects, and those have been mild and transient.

What about myocarditis? Well, the prime age group for that is kids reaching puberty which largely eliminates the 5-to-11s; we think the sex hormones may play a role there. Even so, it is "very, very rare," according to Dr. David Kimberlin, infectious disease pediatrician at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, speaking to NPR. It is typically managed with ibuprofen, it is transient, and no one has died from vaccine-associated myocarditis. We should also remember that Covid-19 causes myocarditis at a higher rate and less easily resolved, so with more dire consequences. Dr. Matthew Oster, pediatric cardiologist at Children's Healthcare of Atlanta, told NPR, "The bottom line is getting COVID, I think, is much riskier to the heart than getting this vaccine." It doesn't make sense to take that chance with a child. The more people get vaccinated, the higher the probability the virus will find your child; this thing funnels down to the susceptibles, and the fewer of them there are, the more likely they'll be to get it—until we reach herd immunity, if we ever do. Ninety percent of counties in the US still have what the CDC calls "high" or "substantial" transmission; that's nothing to mess with because we have no way at all to predict which child is going to get very sick.

Additionally, if the child has contact with vulnerable family members—grandparents, aunts and uncles, those with cancers or other immunocompromising conditions—they represent a real risk to those folks. Vaccinating children enables long-delayed family visits and makes them safer. The issue is more acute if you live in a northern climate where the weather is getting colder this time of year and soon you won't be able, practically speaking, to meet up outdoors. If you plan holiday gatherings with family and friends, consider who will be present to whom your children may represent a significant risk.

How about kids who've already had Covid-19? They don't need vaccine, do they? I wish I could tell you for sure. No studies I've seen address children specifically, but the work that's been done in adults indicates the immunity resulting from natural infection is unreliable. Some people are better protected, but others are not; and we don't really have a good way to identify who is who there. Additionally, we're not sure how durable immunity from natural infection is. We think mild infections, the kind kids usually get, are not as protective in terms of eliciting a beneficial immune response, so that's another factor. Antibody tests are not useful for this purpose. The only means by which we are sure a child acquires strong and durable protection against Covid-19 is vaccination.

If my parents were with us today, I think they'd be puzzled by the degree of reluctance to vaccinate children we are now seeing. As young parents, they lived through the specter of an infectious disease that could endanger their children, and I don't believe they would understand at all what's holding people back. The only case in which I might consider waiting a bit is a child who is about to turn 12 because the dose changes when the child turns 12. It could go either way for those kids; I can see advantages to starting now and advantages to waiting a few more days. For the record, the American Academy of Pediatrics

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recommends giving a child who turns 12 in between first and second doses the lower (10-microgram) dose for both shots. Your unvaccinated child definitely should be masking in public indoor spaces; but the bottom line is the best way to protect that child—and everyone with whom he comes in contact—is to vaccinate. Please consider it.

There are also studies underway in children under the age of 5. Pfizer/BioNTech is farthest along the way, and they are now in phase 2/3 trials for the 2 to 5 age group. They expect to have data ready for readout by the end of the year or early 2022. The 6-month to 2-year-old age group is also in phase 2/3 trials and also expected to yield results around the end of 2021. We know the routine from there: the FDA's VRBPAC will recommend followed by the FDA commissioner's decision, and then the CDC's ACIP will recommend followed by the CDC's director's decision. I'd guess that, if all goes well, these younger kids will be receiving vaccine before March. Dr. Philip Landrigan, pediatrician and immunologist at Boston College, told CNN, "There's every reason to think that it will be safe, and it will be efficacious;" but I fully expect the rigor of the analysis will track with the age of the potential recipients. An additional 50 million doses of this vaccine have been purchased and are expected for delivery by April 30, 2022. So there should be plenty for the little ones once the vaccine is authorized for the age group. Moderna is in trials in this age group as well, so their data could come in around the same timeline. Janssen/Johnson & Johnson is coming along with phase 3 trials in the 12-to-17 age group. They are still designing studies for younger children.

I've read a study of booster doses given through the Clalit Health Services in Israel between July 30, 2020, and September 23, 2021. The paper was published last week in *The Lancet* and comes from a research group in Israel and at Harvard's TH Chan School of Public Health. The team looked at individuals receiving boosters against a matched sample who were fully vaccinated, but did not receive boosters. None had a prior documented infection with SARS-CoV-2; none were health care workers, long-term care residents, or medically confined to their homes. Each group contained 728,321 individuals, so this was a huge study. Vaccine effectiveness in this study for the booster was estimated at 93 percent against admission to hospital, 92 percent against severe disease, and 81 percent against Covid-related death. The divergence in effectiveness between boosted and unboosted individuals emerged around one week after the booster dose was administered and was similar irrespective of age or sex of the participant, which means the boosters worked approximately equally well in all groups. Now please note the control group was not unvaccinated people, but those who had received two doses of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine at least five months prior; so all of the people in this study were fully vaccinated. Allowing for some statistical wizardry, roughly ninety-three percent of those hospitalized were people who were fully vaccinated but did not receive a booster; only seven percent were in those who had. This means the 93 percent improvement in effectiveness is over and above the protection provided by full vaccination. Because the samples were matched for things like risk for severe disease, place of residence, age, sex, and such, the primary difference between those in the experimental (booster) group and the control (no booster) group was that booster. This is sound science. And the news is good.

The WHO has given emergency authorization to another vaccine, this one Covaxin which was developed and will be manufactured in India. This is an inactivated virus vaccine, viral particles whose genes have been disabled by exposure to a substance called beta-propiolactone. As is typical for inactivated vaccines, this one needs to be adjuvanted; the adjuvant is an aluminum compound called Alhydroxyquim-II that enhances and extends the duration of the immune response to the inactivated virus. The vaccine is given in two doses 28 days apart. It stores at room temperature, which is a huge advantage, particularly in low-income countries; shelf-life is 12 months. The company, Bharat Biotech, expects to produce at a pace of one billion doses per year by the end of this year. The phase 3 clinical trial was conducted in India and involved 25,800 participants aged 18 to 98, 4500 of whom have co-morbidities that place them at high risk for severe disease. Efficacy against symptomatic infection was 77.8 percent (63.6 percent against Delta) and against severe disease was 93.4 percent. The safety profile looks very good.

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Here's what could be an exceptionally bad piece of news: A study of white-tailed deer in Iowa done by researchers at Pennsylvania State University shows that up to 80 percent of the wild and captive populations sampled between April, 2020, and January, 2021, have been infected with SARS-CoV-2. The rate of infection in the deer far outstripped what was being seen in humans in the state. Given the way genomic and geographic spread data looked when laid against those patterns in the human population, it seems pretty certain the deer were infected through multiple contacts with humans, although no one's too sure exactly how that happened. It is also pretty clearly being transmitted deer-to-deer as well. It is not yet clear whether the deer are getting sick.

We do not need this: If deer-to-human transmission can be shown—and it is important to note that so far it cannot—a reservoir of infection in animals, especially wild ones, represents a large potential threat. There would be myriad opportunities for deer-to-human transmission to occur because the deer population is so large and has so many points of contact with humans. There are 38 million white-tailed deer in the US, and many of them live in proximity to people, even to densely-populated people. Additionally, such a reservoir would offer the virus a great opportunity to reproduce and mutate in the animals, perhaps emerging one day as a new and far more dangerous variant.

The paper has not been peer-reviewed and is available in preprint only at this point, but the Iowa Department of Natural Resources is sufficiently concerned that it has suggested hunters in the state employ precautions against transmission from deer carcasses. These include wearing rubber gloves and masks while field dressing and processing, sanitizing hands and instruments after dressing, and bagging remains before disposing of them. Eating the cooked meat from an infected deer should not be risky as long as the meat is cooked to an internal temperature of 165 degrees Fahrenheit.

And finally, we have some trash to take out again—more misinformation. First up: A claim that there is a link between Covid-19 vaccines and HIV. The latest purveyor of this garbage is none other than the President of Brazil, that intrepid virus enabler, Jair Bolsonaro, who is suggesting that HIV is developing disproportionately in people who are fully-vaccinated against Covid-19. To be clear, there is zero evidence to support this assertion. None at all. No one is seeing that.

I suspect the genesis of this particular idea may be an Australian-developed vaccine tested early on in the pandemic, something I wrote about back last December. The vaccine in question was a protein subunit vaccine, that is, it involved injecting viral proteins to directly stimulate an immune response. The proteins included were coronavirus spike (S) protein along with a protein from the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) because the HIV protein seemed to enhance the immune response to the coronavirus protein. Now since both of these proteins are just chemicals—pieces—from the two viruses, not entire or active virus particles, they couldn't cause either kind of infection; but the trial vaccine did cause some recipients to have a false-positive test for HIV. You can imagine how that was received by the public. The researchers working on this product decided this vaccine was never going to achieve public acceptance, and vaccine development was abandoned, leaving a shadow someone could exploit to keep this pandemic going, and so someone has.

Stupid claim #2 for the day comes from social media, source of so many stupid claims: It is that Moderna vaccine contains luciferin in a "66.6 solution." A couple of things here: Luciferin is an actual thing, a class of light-emitting organic compounds found in organisms that generate bioluminescence, that is, they light up. When luciferins are acted upon by an enzyme called a luciferase in the presence of oxygen, they produce a temporary intermediate compound that emits light until it decays. An example of bioluminescence is the little blinking light generated by a firefly. The 66.6 is of course a reference to "the devil's number" or "the number of the beast" invoked in the Bible's Book of Revelations. I don't keep up on my conspiracy theo-

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ries as I should, but I believe the use of 666 marks someone as a follower of the Antichrist. So we have plenty of satanic references here to scare folks, what with both Lucifer and 666. (If you were wondering what those chemicals in the firefly's abdomen have in common with the devil so that their names are so related, here's the thing. According to the Bible, Satan began as an angel and then went bad. His angel name was Lucifer; it means "bringer of light." So Lucifer has to do with light, not evil, thus the connection to bioluminescence. Technically, now that Satan has become, you know, Satan, he isn't Lucifer anymore. I guess that means references to luciferin probably shouldn't evoke Satan anyhow then, should they? They should make us think only of light.)

There is a larger problem with this whole Satanic theory though: There doesn't happen to be any luciferin or luciferase in the Moderna (or any other) vaccine. None at all. I've read the ingredients list for every vaccine currently authorized in the US, so I'm sure. I really love that in one version of the wild-eyed social media posts going around, the writer closes with this: "You can't make this stuff up!"

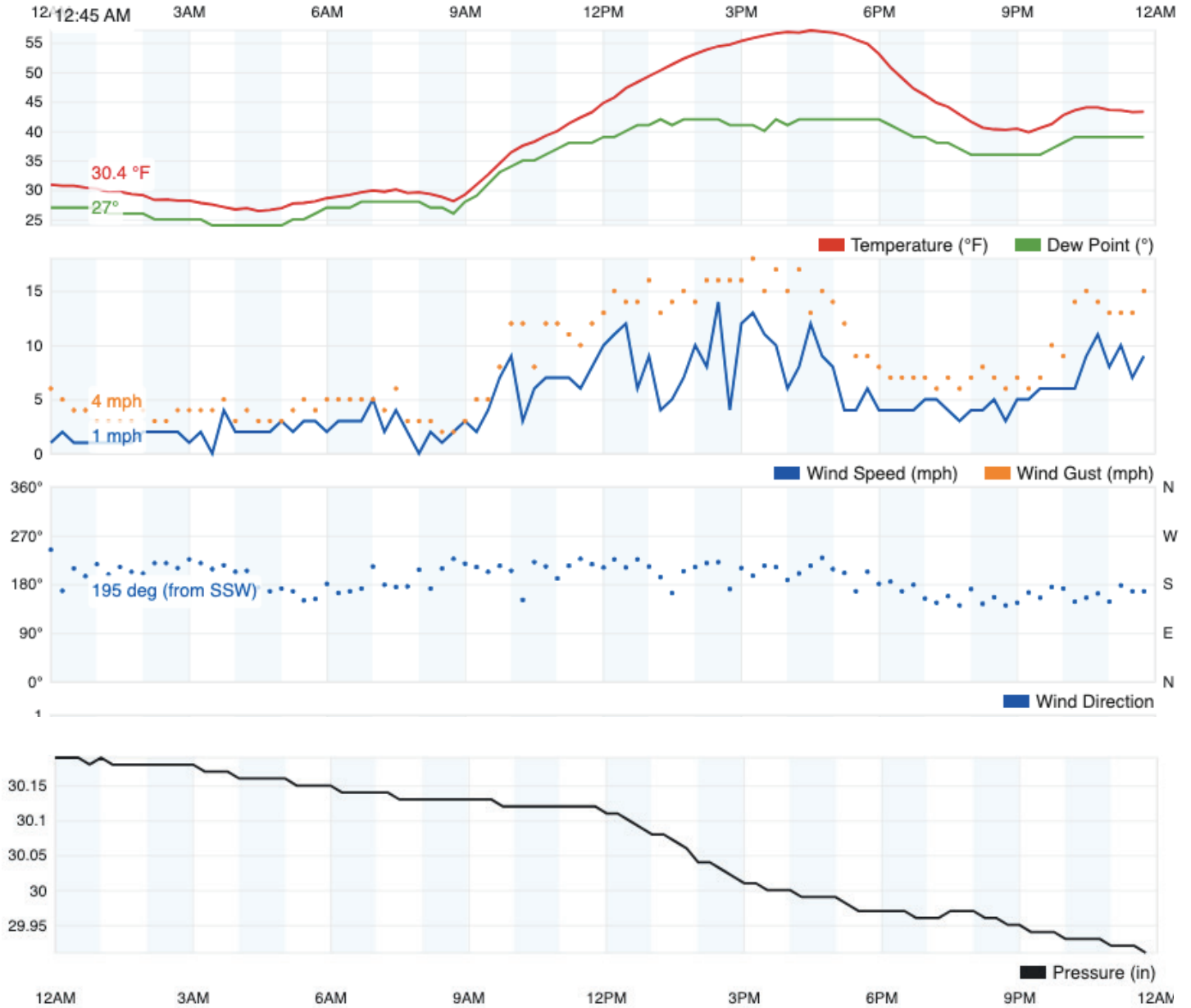
Apparently you can.

And that's all for today. Stay well, and we'll talk again.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



Decreasing
Clouds

High: 63 °F

Tonight



Mostly Clear

Low: 34 °F

Saturday



Sunny

High: 64 °F

Saturday
Night



Partly Cloudy

Low: 36 °F

Sunday



Partly Sunny

High: 60 °F

Today
56-66°F

Saturday
60-70°F

Sunday
57-67°F

Mild and Dry
This Weekend

Aberdeen, SD
Updated: 11/5/2021 4:56 AM Central

Much above average temperatures can be expected today and through the weekend. Highs will gradually warm into the 50s and 60s.

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Today in Weather History

November 5th, 1959: A strong cold front brought near blizzard conditions and bitterly cold temperatures. As a result, high temperatures in many locations only reached the upper teens. Some daytime highs include; 19 degrees in Pierre and Waubay; 18 degrees in Aberdeen, Faulkton, Kennebec, Pollock, and Roscoe; 17 degrees in Eureka, Gettysburg, Mobridge, and Watertown; and 15 degrees in Timber Lake and near McIntosh. Some record or near-record lows also occurred near midnight on the 5th. Some lows include; 2 degrees in Aberdeen; 1 degree near McIntosh; 0 degrees in Timber Lake and Pollock; and 2 degrees below zero in Kennebec.

1988: An F1 tornado touched down south of Altoona near Hollidaysburg. Several homes were damaged with roofs torn off and broken windows, numerous trees were toppled, and garages and other outbuildings were destroyed.

1991: Nearly 3,000 individuals were killed in the Philippines when Tropical Storm Thelma produced massive flooding on this day. The storm was the second major disaster of the year as Mount Pinatubo violently erupted on June 12th. 1894: A significant snowstorm impacted New England on November 5th through 6th. It formed off the New Jersey coast on the 5th and passed east of Connecticut with rapidly increasing heavy rain, snow, and high winds. The heavy snow and high winds caused significant damage to trees and brought down telegraph poles by the hundreds. As a result, all southern New England's telegraph and telephone services were crippled, and fallen poles and trees delayed railroad trains.

1894 - The famous Election Day snowstorm occurred in Connecticut. As much as a foot of wet snow fell, and the snow and high winds caused great damage to wires and trees. Winds gusted to 60 mph at Block Island RI. (David Ludlum)

1961 - Strong Santa Ana winds fanned the flames of the Bel Air and Brentwood fires in southern California destroying many homes. At 10 PM the Los Angeles Civic Center reported a temperature of 74 degrees along with a dew point of 5 degrees. On the 6th, Burbank reported a relative humidity of three percent. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - A slow moving storm produced five to nine inch rains across northern Georgia causing the Toccoa Dam to burst. As the earthen dam collapsed the waters rushed through the Toccoa Falls Bible College killing three persons in the dorms. Thirty-eight persons perished at a trailer park along the stream. (David Ludlum)

1987 - Low pressure off the California coast produced stormy weather in the southwestern U.S. Flash flooding stranded 8000 persons in the Death Valley National Park of southern California. Thunderstorms over southern Nevada produced dime size hail and wind gusts to 68 mph around Las Vegas. Unseasonably mild weather in the northeastern U.S. was replaced with snow and gale force winds. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - A powerful low pressure system produced high winds from the Great Plains to New England, and produced heavy snow in northern Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. Winds gusted to 64 mph at Knoxville TN, and reached 80 mph at Pleasant Valley VT. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Temperatures warmed into the 80s across much of Texas. Highs of 86 degrees at Abilene, Fort Worth and San Angelo were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

2002 - Severe thunderstorms moved across southeastern Alabama and the Florida panhandle, producing wind damage and several tornadoes. A tornado struck the Alabama town of Abbeville killing 2 people and injuring 25 (Associated Press).

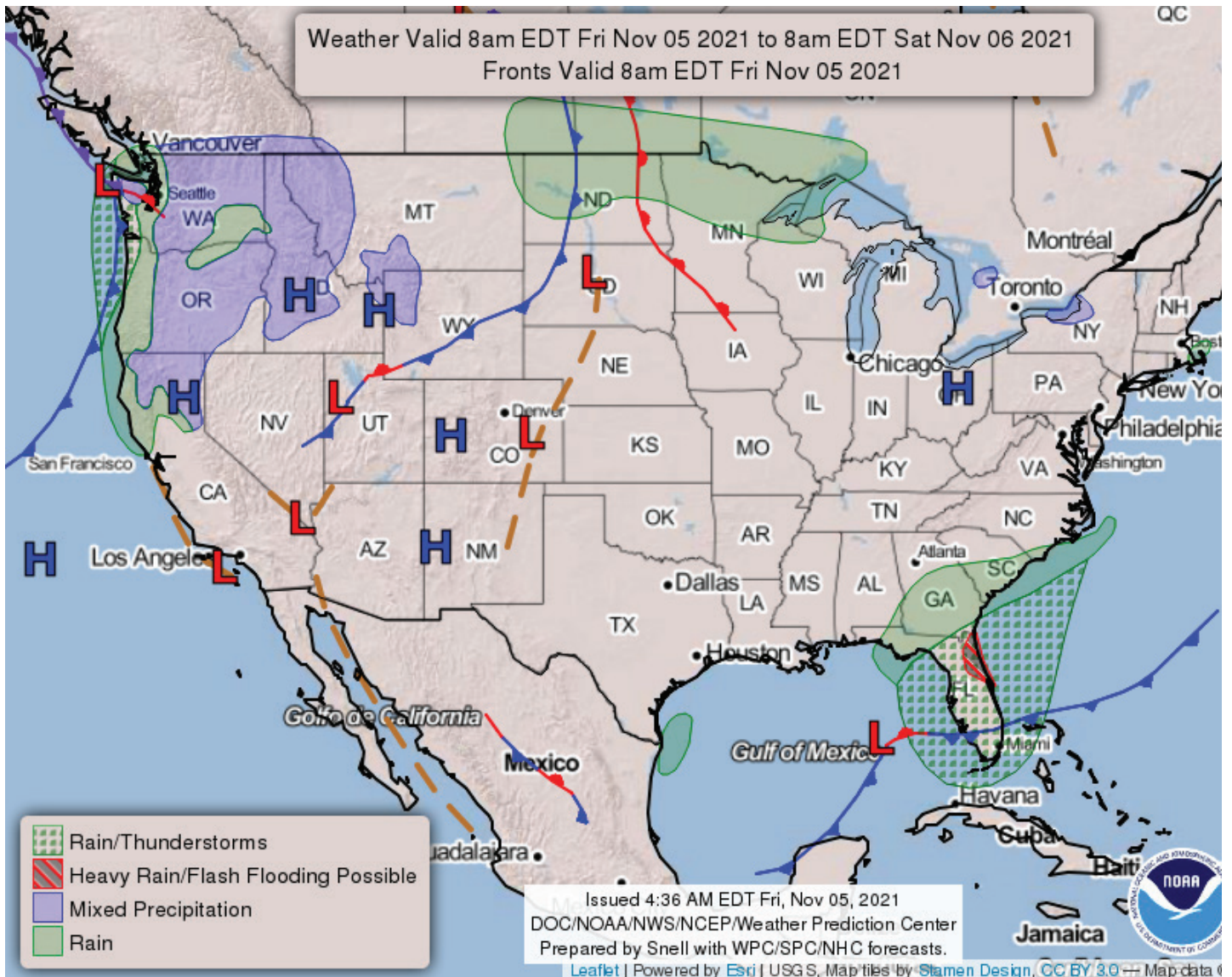
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Today's Info

High Temp: 57.1 °F
Low Temp: 26.4 °F
Wind: 18 mph
Precip: 0.00

Record High: 76° in 2016
Record Low: -6° in 2003
Average High: 48°F
Average Low: 24°F
Average Precip in Nov.: 0.17
Precip to date in Nov.: 4.30
Average Precip to date: 20.64
Precip Year to Date: 19.72
Sunset Tonight: 6:16:48 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:16:31 AM



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THE THOUGHT OF ETERNITY

There was no one to write about it, and actually, nothing to write about. There was no calendar to record the number of days or years or even centuries or ages. It was a beginning without a beginning and the only Person there was God. He needed no one and was in need of nothing.

But He chose to create the heavens and the earth. And with no pre-existing materials or anyone to help Him, it was the power of His words that brought everything into existence that is or ever will be.

When He said, "Let us make the man," we know what happened: He formed man's body from the "dust" of the ground. And we know that this "dust" is a combination of all of the various chemical elements that make up the physical body of a man.

Our bodies did not "evolve." Our bodies were "built" by God from the earth that He created. God also breathed the breath - or the spirit - of life into that body. At that moment, "man" became a living soul.

We do much to take care of our bodies. Each day we are reminded of the cost of "healthcare" and how very important it is for us to take proper care of our bodies. But we seem to have forgotten the words of Jesus: "What good," He asked, "will it be for someone to gain the whole world and forfeit their soul?" Why is this an important question?

Our Psalmist said: "When You take away their breath they die and return to the dust." But not the soul.

Prayer: We thank You Lord, for Jesus, Your Son and our Savior, who gave His life for us to live for You forever. You have always had a plan for us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: When You take away their breath they die and return to the dust. Psalm 104:29

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2021 Community Events

- Cancelled** Legion Post #39 Spring Fundraiser (Sunday closest to St. Patrick's Day, every other year)
03/27/2021 Lions Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter Weekend)
04/10/2021 Dueling Pianos Baseball Fundraiser at the American Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
04/24/2021 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
04/25/2021 Princess Prom (Sunday after GHS Prom)
05/01/2021 Lions Club Spring City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
05/31/2021 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
6/7-9/2021 St. John's Lutheran Church VBS
06/17/2021 Groton Transit Fundraiser, 4-7 p.m.
06/18/2021 SDSU Alumni & Friends Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
06/19/2021 U8 Baseball Tournament
06/19/2021 **Postponed to Aug. 28th:** Lions Crazy Golf Fest at Olive Grove Golf Course, Noon
06/26/2021 U10 Baseball Tournament
06/27/2021 U12 Baseball Tournament
07/04/2021 Firecracker Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
07/11/2021 Lions Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 10am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
07/22/2021 Pro-Am Golf Tournament at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/30/2021-08/03/2021 State "B" American Legion Baseball Tournament in Groton
08/06/2021 Wine on Nine at Olive Grove Golf Course
08/13/2021 Groton Basketball Golf Tournament
Cancelled Lions Club Crazy Golf Fest 9am Olive Grove Golf Course
08/29/2021 Groton Firemen Summer Splash Day at GHS Parking Lot (4-5 p.m.)
09/11/2021 Lions Club Fall City-Wide Rummage Sales 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
09/12/2021 Sunflower Classic Golf Tournament at Olive Grove
09/18-19 Groton Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
10/08/2021 Lake Region Marching Band Festival (2nd Friday in October)
10/09/2021 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm (Saturday before Columbus Day)
10/29/2021 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
10/29/2021 Groton United Methodist Trunk or Treat (Halloween)
11/13/2021 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party (Saturday closest to Veteran's Day)
11/25/2021 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
12/04/2021 Olive Grove Tour of Homes
12/11/2021 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9am-Noon

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press undefined

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Douglas def. Spearfish, 15-25, 21-25, 25-22, 27-25, 15-10

Huron def. Brandon Valley, 26-24, 25-21, 25-19

Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Aberdeen Central, 25-16, 25-18, 25-20

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Mitchell, 25-20, 25-16, 21-25, 25-14

Watertown def. Yankton, 25-10, 25-21, 11-25, 25-13

SoDak Semifinal=

Class A=

Region 1=

Florence/Henry def. Milbank, 27-25, 25-16, 25-13

Redfield def. Groton Area, 25-22, 17-25, 20-25, 25-19, 15-7

Region 2=

Elkton-Lake Benton def. Deubrook, 16-25, 25-8, 25-19, 25-15

Hamlin def. Great Plains Lutheran, 25-19, 25-22, 25-15

Region 3=

Garretson def. Madison, 25-12, 25-17, 25-16

Sioux Falls Christian def. Baltic, 25-13, 25-14, 25-15

Region 4=

Dakota Valley def. Parker, 25-19, 25-20, 25-13

Elk Point-Jefferson def. Beresford, 25-16, 25-18, 25-23

Region 5=

Parkston def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 25-21, 21-25, 25-23, 25-20

Wagner def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 25-14, 25-16, 25-16

Region 6=

Mobridge-Pollock def. Chamberlain, 25-18, 25-15, 25-17

Winner def. Dupree, 25-16, 25-21, 25-12

Region 7=

Lakota Tech def. Todd County, 25-22, 18-25, 22-25, 25-23, 15-11

Pine Ridge def. Bennett County, 21-25, 25-15, 25-19, 25-23

Region 8=

Hill City def. Belle Fourche, 25-22, 25-18, 25-6

Rapid City Christian def. St. Thomas More, 25-18, 25-19, 25-16

Class B=

Region 1=

Aberdeen Christian def. Northwestern, 18-25, 25-19, 26-24, 29-27

Warner def. Aberdeen Roncalli, 25-16, 25-10, 25-10

Region 2=

Faulkton def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-17, 25-20, 25-21

Miller def. Potter County, 25-20, 25-13, 20-25, 26-24

Region 3=

Arlington def. Estelline/Hendricks, 25-15, 25-16, 25-15

Wolsey-Wessington def. Castlewood, 25-23, 25-21, 30-28

Region 4=

Chester def. Ethan, 25-15, 16-25, 25-20, 25-14

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Colman-Egan def. Bridgewater-Emery, 21-25, 23-25, 25-22, 25-19, 15-12

Region 5=

Freeman def. Irene-Wakonda, 19-25, 28-26, 19-25, 25-22, 18-16

Gayville-Volin def. Alcester-Hudson, 25-21, 25-10, 25-16

Region 6=

Burke def. Tripp-Delmont/Armour, 25-16, 22-25, 25-17, 25-16

Platte-Geddes def. Avon, 25-11, 25-12, 25-7

Region 7=

Edgemont def. White River, 25-22, 17-25, 25-18, 19-25, 15-11

Philip def. Jones County, 25-16, 22-25, 25-20

Region 8=

Faith def. Bison, 25-19, 25-14, 25-12

Timber Lake def. Harding County, 25-14, 25-14, 25-18

Some high school volleyball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Information from: ScoreStream Inc., <http://ScoreStream.com>

GOP state officials push back on employer vaccine mandate

By ANDREW DeMILLO and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) — Republican state officials reacted with swift rebukes Thursday to President Joe Biden's newly detailed mandate for private employers to require workers to be vaccinated against COVID-19, threatening a wave of lawsuits and other actions to thwart a requirement they see as a stark example of government overreach.

At least two conservative groups moved quickly to file lawsuits against the workplace safety mandate, and a growing roster of GOP governors and attorneys general said more lawsuits were on the way as soon as Friday. Some Republican-led states had already passed laws or executive orders intended to protect employers that may not want to comply.

"This rule is garbage," South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson, a Republican, said Thursday through a spokesperson. "It's unconstitutional and we will fight it." His state's governor, Republican Henry McMaster, said he is planning to issue an executive order keeping state agencies from enforcing the rule.

States have been preparing for the requirement since Biden previewed it in September. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration requirements released Thursday call for companies with 100 or more employees to be vaccinated by Jan. 4 or be tested weekly. Failure to comply could result in penalties of nearly \$14,000 per violation. Federal officials also left open the possibility of expanding the mandate to smaller employers.

The White House said the administration has the authority to take actions designed to protect workers and expects the rule to withstand legal challenges.

Republican governors or attorneys general in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Oklahoma and South Dakota said Thursday they would file lawsuits against the mandate. The Daily Wire, a conservative media company, filed a challenge in federal court on Thursday. So did companies in Michigan and Ohio represented by a conservative advocacy law firm.

Robert Alt, a lawyer representing the Midwest companies suing— manufacturer Phillips Manufacturing & Tower Company and packaging firm Sixarp — said both companies are already facing staffing shortages amid the pandemic. The mandate will make things worse, he said.

"It adds insult to injury and forces them potentially to fire trained employees," said Alt, president and CEO of The Buckeye Institute, a conservative advocacy group.

States say they are focusing on the role of the federal government in the lawsuits they're preparing.

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"While I agree that the vaccine is the tool that will best protect against COVID-19, this federal government approach is unprecedented and will bring about harmful, unintended consequences in the supply chain and the workforce," Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb said in a statement.

At a news conference, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis criticized what he called an "executive fiat" for the private sector. Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds characterized the mandate as an imposition on personal choice, saying people should be able to make their own health care decisions. She recently signed a bill guaranteeing that people who are fired for refusing a vaccine can qualify for unemployment benefits.

At least 19 Republican-led states previously sued the Biden administration over a separate mandate requiring vaccines for employees who work for federal contractors. Several more filed similar lawsuits Thursday.

Biden, in a statement Thursday, dismissed the argument from many GOP governors and lawmakers that a mandate for employers will hurt businesses' ability to keep workers on the job.

"There have been no 'mass firings' and worker shortages because of vaccination requirements," he said. "Despite what some predicted and falsely assert, vaccination requirements have broad public support."

The administration has been encouraging widespread vaccinations as the quickest way out of the pandemic. A White House spokeswoman, Karine Jean-Pierre, said during a briefing Thursday that the mandate was intended to halt the spread of a disease that has claimed more than 750,000 lives in the U.S.

"So you know, the question that we always have and that we ask to the Republicans is, why are they getting in the way?" Jean-Pierre said. "Why are they getting in the way of trying to protect and save lives? That's all we're trying to do."

Challenges to the workplace mandate from Republicans and conservative groups are expected to be broad-based and quick, reflecting yet another aspect of the COVID-19 response — from mask requirements to social-distancing guidelines — that has fallen into a partisan divide. Democratic governors and attorneys general were relatively quiet after the OSHA rules were announced on Thursday. From California, Gov. Gavin Newsom issued a simple Twitter message: "The right move." Another Democrat, North Carolina Attorney General Josh Stein, defended mandates in an emailed statement to The Associated Press.

Laura Kelly, the Democratic governor in Republican-dominated Kansas, was trying to walk a fine line on the new workplace rules. She said after a chamber of commerce event Thursday that federal mandates "tend not to work" and that she wanted a "Kansas-focused" way to meet, them but did not give details.

All 26 Republican state attorneys general have previously said they would fight the requirements, and most of them signed a letter to Biden saying as much.

Key to their objection is whether OSHA has the legal authority to require vaccines or virus testing.

In the letter to Biden, the top state government lawyers argued that the agency can regulate only health risks that are specific to jobs — not ones that are in the world generally. Seema Nanda, the top legal official for the U.S. Department of Labor, which includes OSHA, says established legal precedent allows rules that keep workplaces safe and that those rules pre-empt state laws.

That hasn't stopped state lawmakers and governors for taking a variety of actions aimed at undercutting federal mandates.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott last month issued an executive order prohibiting private companies or any other entity from requiring vaccines. An Ohio lawmaker has proposed a bill barring schools and colleges from expelling students who refuse vaccines and preventing employers from firing workers who do so.

Arkansas has adopted a law creating a vaccine-mandate exemption for workers who can prove they have COVID-19 antibodies, although a broader measure banning employers from asking about vaccination status failed in the Legislature. The OSHA rule does include a religious exemption, as well as one for people who work exclusively outdoors or away from others — such as from home.

Lawmakers or governors in states including Kansas, South Dakota and Wyoming have called for special legislative sessions to counter vaccine mandates. In Nebraska, not enough state lawmakers agreed to a special session to get one on the calendar, but Gov. Pete Ricketts, a Republican in a GOP-dominated state, has been pushing them to keep trying.

In Ohio, factory owner Ross McGregor said he will follow the rules as he would any federal workplace

mandate, but not because he agrees with them. McGregor, who said he is vaccinated, is opposed to the new requirement, just as he has publicly opposed efforts by Ohio Republican lawmakers to prevent him from mandating the coronavirus vaccine for his workers.

"At the end of the day, every employer, and every employment situation, dictates what is best," said McGregor, a former Republican state lawmaker and owner of axle and brake component manufacturer Pentaflex, where he estimates that about half the 115 or so employees are vaccinated. "Having either a ban on mandates or an imposition of mandates goes against that"

This version corrects new paragraph six to say it is the The Daily Wire, not Daily Caller, that filed a lawsuit, and to remove a reference to a lawsuit filed by Indiana, Louisiana and Mississippi. That suit filed Thursday addresses a separate, narrower mandate for federal contractors.

Mulvihill reported from Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Associated Press writers Jeffrey Collins in Columbia, South Carolina; Tom Davies in Indianapolis; Heather Hollingsworth in Lake Quivira, Kansas; Alexandra Jaffe in Washington, D.C.; and Andrew Welsh-Huggins in Columbus, Ohio, contributed to this report, along with other AP reporters from around the U.S.

Noem contradicts labor secretary on meeting with daughter

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem contradicted her own labor secretary Thursday about a meeting last year in her office, saying it didn't include any discussion about how her daughter could still win a real estate appraiser license after a state agency moved to deny it.

The Republican governor answered questions from South Dakota reporters on the episode for the first time Thursday, more than a month after The Associated Press first reported on it. While a Republican-dominated legislative committee and state government ethics board have looked into the matter, she called AP's reporting on the meeting "twisted" and "manipulated."

Noem's secretary of labor defended her department's actions to lawmakers last week by explaining that state regulators before the meeting had already reached an agreement to provide Noem's daughter, Cassidy Peters, with an opportunity to fix issues with her application. She said the meeting mostly consisted of potential fixes to a shortage of licensed appraisers.

However, Secretary of Labor Marcia Hultman told lawmakers it also included a "brief discussion at the end" of the meeting about a "possible plan forward" for Peters to obtain her license.

But when Noem was asked by the AP at a Thursday news conference if she was aware of that plan headed into the meeting, she responded by saying, "We didn't even talk about that" and insisted the meeting was not to discuss Peters' application.

"She gave her personal experiences through the program," Noem said. "Of course, she gave her perspective and how long it took to go through the program and how difficult it was."

However, Sherry Bren, the longtime director of the Appraiser Certification Program, told the AP she was presented at the meeting with a letter from Peters' supervisor that slammed the agency's move to deny her the license.

Four months after the meeting, Peters received the license.

Noem once again insisted Peters "went through the exact same process that other appraisers did in the state of South Dakota. She at no time received special treatment."

Noem has also defended her conduct in the episode by saying she was working to solve a shortage of appraisers in the state. However, she has faced backlash from the organization that represents appraisers after Hultman pressured Bren to retire late last year, shortly after Peters received her license. Bren filed an age discrimination complaint and received a \$200,000 payment from the state to withdraw the complaint and leave her job.

"I came in to fix the program. And so we are fixing it," she said. "But also we recognize that some people

that have been involved in the industry for a long time don't like that."

The Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee, which is looking into the agency at the center of the episode, has requested copies of the agreements between Peters and the agency, but Noem said doing so would set a precedent of opening personnel files to the public.

"That's why for consistency and to make sure that I'm being fair — because that's exactly what I'm focused on — I would have to set that same precedent for everybody," she said.

When asked if she would allow the documents to be opened because the agreements themselves state they are open to public inspection, she said she would let her attorneys decide what should be deemed an open record.

Attorneys for the Department of Labor and Regulation have already denied a public records request from the AP for the records. An appeals office later ruled that the department was right to deny the records request.

While Bren declined an invitation from the Legislature to speak last week, she has said she is working with her lawyer to communicate with lawmakers and correct "any factual inaccuracies" from Hultman's testimony.

Vaccine mandate protesters sue South Dakota over permit

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Protesters against COVID-19 vaccine mandates in South Dakota filed a lawsuit against Gov. Kristi Noem late Wednesday after the state denied their application to demonstrate on Capitol grounds during a special legislative session this month.

The group of protesters, who call themselves Blue State Refugees, said they planned to hold a demonstration next week to push the Legislature to take up a bill that would keep businesses from requiring vaccines as a condition of employment. But they were told by state employees that they could not hold the event on Capitol grounds because it was being decorated for a Christmas display.

The Institute for Free Speech, which has advocated for campaign finance deregulation and free speech rights, is representing the plaintiffs in their lawsuit and called that decision a "deprivation of speech and petition rights."

"The Noem administration is restricting First Amendment rights and blaming it on Christmas. It doesn't take two months to decorate, and it doesn't require banning rallies across the entire capitol grounds," Alan Gura, the organization's vice president for litigation, said in a statement.

The group is asking the federal court to order the state government to permit their protest for two days starting next Monday.

"We're working to accommodate those individuals," the governor said at a news conference Thursday. "Nobody's being denied their free speech rights."

The dispute touches on a rift within the state GOP over how much the government should step in to stop employers from requiring vaccines for their workers. Noem, who has carved out a national reputation for her hands-off approach to pandemic restrictions, has argued that it's not her job to tell businesses how to handle the issue. Some Republican lawmakers, critical of Noem's stance, want to take up the issue while they meet in Pierre next week to tackle redistricting and the possible impeachment of the state's attorney general.

However, last week Noem issued an executive order to make it easy for state employees to obtain medical and religious exemptions if they should ever face a federal vaccine mandate. She said she was also talking to lawmakers about extending those protections to private employees.

South Dakota health care systems ready to inoculate children

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Two of South Dakota's largest health care systems are beginning to vaccinate children ages 5 to 11 for COVID-19 now that Pfizer doses are arriving at their hospitals and clinics.

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Both Sanford Health and Avera Health say they are ready for the rush of vaccine appointments. Sanford's Dr. Joseph Segeleon says pediatric vaccinations will help bring the end of the pandemic closer, KSFY-TV reported.

Segeleon said people should start thinking of COVID-19 as a vaccine preventable disease. He said children already receive vaccines for other diseases.

"We give vaccines for chickenpox. We give vaccines for influenza. Why do we do that? We want to reduce severe disease in children. We want to reduce death. And we want to reduce the disease burden of that infectious disease in the community," said Segeleon.

Some parents are already trying to find the quickest way to get their children vaccinated, knowing that it will help protect their family.

Morgan Bartlett said her daughter just turned 5 years old a couple of months ago and plans to get her vaccinated not only for her health, but for the protection of the rest of her family.

"So for us to be completely vaccinated like this, just adds another layer of security that we need. And it will help us kind of continue to move forward and feel more comfortable being around other people," said Bartlett.

At Sanford, parents can start calling Thursday to set up appointments to get their children vaccinated. At Avera, parents can call their clinic to get more information on when and where to get the vaccine as well.

Pfizer says COVID-19 pill cut hospital, death risk by 90%

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pfizer Inc. said Friday that its experimental antiviral pill for COVID-19 cut rates of hospitalization and death by nearly 90% in high-risk adults, as the drugmaker joins the race to bring the first easy-to-use medication against the coronavirus to the U.S. market.

Currently all COVID-19 treatments used in the U.S. require an IV or injection. Competitor Merck's COVID-19 pill is already under review at the Food and Drug Administration after showing strong initial results, and on Thursday the United Kingdom became the first country to OK it.

Pfizer said it will ask the FDA and international regulators to authorize its pill as soon as possible, after independent experts recommended halting the company's study based on the strength of its results. Once Pfizer applies, the FDA could make a decision within weeks or months. If authorized the company would sell the drug under the brand name Paxlovid.

Researchers worldwide have been racing to find a pill against COVID-19 that can be taken at home to ease symptoms, speed recovery and reduce the crushing burden on hospitals and doctors.

Pfizer released preliminary results Friday of its study of 775 adults. Patients who received the company's drug along with another antiviral shortly after showing COVID-19 symptoms had an 89% reduction in their combined rate of hospitalization or death after a month, compared to patients taking a dummy pill. Fewer than 1% of patients taking the drug needed to be hospitalized and no one died. In the comparison group, 7% were hospitalized and there were seven deaths.

"We were hoping that we had something extraordinary, but it's rare that you see great drugs come through with almost 90% efficacy and 100% protection for death," said Dr. Mikael Dolsten, Pfizer's chief scientific officer, in an interview.

Study participants were unvaccinated, with mild-to-moderate COVID-19, and were considered high risk for hospitalization due to health problems like obesity, diabetes or heart disease. Treatment began within three to five days of initial symptoms, and lasted for five days. Patients who received the drug earlier showed slightly better results, underscoring the need for speedy testing and treatment.

Pfizer reported few details on side effects but said rates of problems were similar between the groups at about 20%.

An independent group of medical experts monitoring the trial recommended stopping it early, standard procedure when interim results show such a clear benefit. The data have not yet been published for outside review, the normal process for vetting new medical research.

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Top U.S. health officials continue to stress that vaccination will remain the best way to protect against infection. But with tens of millions of adults still unvaccinated — and many more globally — effective, easy-to-use treatments will be critical to curbing future waves of infections.

The FDA has set a public meeting later this month to review Merck's pill, known as molnupiravir. The company reported in September that its drug cut rates of hospitalization and death by 50%. Experts warn against comparing preliminary results because of differences in studies.

Although Merck's pill is further along in the U.S. regulatory process, Pfizer's drug could benefit from a safety profile that is more familiar to regulators with fewer red flags. While pregnant women were excluded from the Merck trial due to a potential risk of birth defects, Pfizer's drug did not have any similar restrictions. The Merck drug works by interfering with the coronavirus' genetic code, a novel approach to disrupting the virus.

Pfizer's drug is part of a decades-old family of antiviral drugs known as protease inhibitors, which revolutionized the treatment of HIV and hepatitis C. The drugs block a key enzyme which viruses need to multiply in the human body.

The drug was first identified during the SARS outbreak originating in Asia during 2003. Last year, company researchers decided to revive the medication and study it for COVID-19, given the similarities between the two coronaviruses.

The U.S. has approved one other antiviral drug for COVID-19, remdesivir, and authorized three antibody therapies that help the immune system fight the virus. But they have to be given by IV or injection at hospitals or clinics, and limited supplies were strained by the last surge of the delta variant.

Shares of Pfizer spiked more than 9% before the opening bell Friday.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Department of Science Education. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

EXPLAINER: What vaccine mandate means for firms and workers

By TOM KRISHER and PAUL WISEMAN AP Business Writers

The Biden administration's sweeping new COVID-19 mandate will apply to 84 million workers at mid-size and large companies.

President Joe Biden described the rules issued Thursday as urgently needed to get more Americans inoculated. Though confirmed viral cases and deaths have fallen sharply since the start of the year, they remain dangerously high, especially in some areas and industries. Average case numbers have leveled off at about 70,000 new infections a day and confirmed viral deaths at more than 1,200 a day.

"Too many people," Biden said, "remain unvaccinated for us to get out of this pandemic for good."

Yet several states with Republican governors have vowed to challenge the Occupational Health and Safety Administration regulations in court, calling them an unconstitutional power grab by the federal government.

Here is a closer look at the new COVID rules and what they mean for companies and their employees:

WHAT DO THE NEW RULES DO?

Private-sector companies with 100 or more workers must require their employees to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or be tested for the virus weekly and wear masks on the job. These requirements will take effect Jan. 4 under an emergency temporary standard from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration.

A separate rule requires workers at health care facilities that receive federal Medicare and Medicaid payments to be vaccinated. This rule, from the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, will apply to 17 million workers at 76,000 health care facilities, including hospitals and long-term care facilities. But doctor's offices with fewer than 100 employees will be exempt because they don't fall under the center's health and safety regulations.

Employers must give workers paid time off to be vaccinated and to recover from any side effects. Vac-

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cinations will be paid for by the federal government, though employees may have to pay for testing. The federal government says the rules supersede state laws that conflict with the standards. Still, some states have threatened to sue.

WHY DID THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION IMPOSE THE MANDATE?

About 70% of U.S. adults are fully vaccinated. Yet that rate of vaccination hasn't been nearly enough to stop the spread of the virus, especially the highly contagious and now dominant delta variant.

Biden noted that businesses that have already imposed mandates on their employees, along with requirements for the military and federal contractors, have cut the number of unvaccinated Americans over age 12 from 100 million in late July to about 60 million.

Even so, more than 750,000 Americans have died from the virus, and tens of thousands of new cases arise daily. OSHA estimates that the new requirements will save 6,500 lives and prevent 250,000 hospitalizations in the six months after the rules take effect.

"Workplace exposures have played a central role in driving the pandemic," said David Michaels, a former OSHA chief who is a professor of public health at George Washington University. "Exposed at work, workers bring home the virus. They infect their children, they infect their parents, they infect their community."

Michaels called the rules an important step toward stopping virus transmission and gradually suppressing COVID.

HOW WILL THE RULES BE ENFORCED?

OSHA says it will enforce the new rules just as it does other workplace safety regulations — by relying largely on whistleblower complaints and some limited spot checks. But OSHA and its state partners that enforce its regulations have only 1,850 inspectors for 8 million workplaces nationwide.

The agency said it will work with companies to have employees vaccinated but would fine them up to \$13,653 for each violation. Companies must collect proof of employee vaccinations and keep records. And employers must prove that unvaccinated employees have taken tests approved by the Food and Drug Administration, and that the tests are properly administered, said Allison Kahn, an employment attorney with Carlton Fields in West Palm Beach, Florida.

"You can't just take an at-home test and tell your employer you're negative," Kahn said. "It has to be somehow proctored."

ARE THERE EXEMPTIONS?

The rules do not apply to employees who work alone, at home or outdoors. In addition, workers may apply for religious or medical exemptions. Nicholas Hulse, an employment lawyer at Fisher & Phillips LLC, noted that companies that have issued their own vaccine mandates are already being deluged with requests to be excused from vaccine requirements.

Normally, Hulse said, religious exemption requests are straightforward: Someone, say, requests Sundays off to attend church or observe a day of rest. Now, he said, it will be "difficult to tell if (anti-vaccine) beliefs are sincerely held, or are they just trying to use religion to get an accommodation?"

The Biden administration plan is sure to generate more such requests for exemptions.

DOES THIS AFFECT ONLY PRIVATE EMPLOYERS?

It's complicated. In 28 states and U.S. territories that enforce OSHA regulations, the new rule will cover both public and private employers.

These states and territories are:

Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, Oregon, Puerto Rico, South Carolina, Tennessee, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Utah, Vermont, Virginia, Washington and Wyoming.

In the remaining states and territories, public employees are not covered by the new mandate.

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WHAT DO BUSINESSES SAY ABOUT THE NEW RULES?

Some are relieved. They may have wanted to require inoculations but worried about alienating vaccine-wary employees and perhaps losing them to rival employers that didn't impose mandates.

"This rule, at least to a certain degree, equalizes the workforce that way," says Amanda Sonneborn, an employment lawyer at King & Spalding.

Richard Wahlquist, CEO of the American Staffing Association, which represents temporary-help agencies and recruiting firms, said that some large companies see the mandate as relieving them of having to make an unpopular decision on whether to require the shots.

"They say: 'Look, as a condition of our continuing to do business, we've just got to go with the mandate, guys,'" Wahlquist said.

That said, companies covered by the new mandates still risk losing workers to smaller companies that are exempt from them, especially at a time when many businesses are struggling to fill job openings and workers are quitting in record numbers.

A Kaiser Family Foundation survey last month found that 37% of unvaccinated workers say they would leave their job if they were required to get jabbed or submit to weekly tests — a figure that rises to 70% if testing isn't an option.

IS THE VACCINE-OR-TEST MANDATE LIKELY TO SURVIVE LEGAL CHALLENGES?

Across the country, Republican governors are lining up to challenge the rules in court.

"This rule is garbage," Alan Wilson, South Carolina's Republican attorney general, said Thursday through a spokesman. "It's unconstitutional, and we will fight it."

It was unclear when South Carolina or other states in opposition would make legal filings challenging it. But Wilson's spokesman, Robert Kittle, said the attorney general's objection was not over the vaccine itself but rather over OSHA's legal authority to impose such a rule.

Only 10 times has OSHA issued an emergency rule, which allows it to bypass normal administrative procedures, including the need to seek public comment. Until it issued an emergency rule in June covering COVID risks in the health care industry, it hadn't done so in 38 years.

And no wonder: The courts have overturned four emergency rules and partially blocked a fifth, according to a review by the Congressional Research Service. To fast-track its rules, the agency must show that it's acting to protect workers from a "grave danger."

The Biden administration is betting that fighting a pandemic that has claimed hundreds of thousands of American lives clearly meets that standard.

AP Writers Christopher Rugaber in Washington and Geoff Mulvihill in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

Son and colleagues to eulogize soldier-diplomat Colin Powell

By ROBERT BURNS and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Friends, family and former colleagues are honoring Colin L. Powell, the widely praised soldier-diplomat who rose from humble Bronx beginnings to become the first Black chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and later served as the first Black secretary of state.

Powell is being remembered at a funeral Friday at the Washington National Cathedral. President Joe Biden is expected to attend but not speak. Eulogists are to be Madeleine Albright, who preceded Powell as the nation's top diplomat; Richard Armitage, who was deputy secretary under Powell and had known him since they served together in the Pentagon during the Reagan administration; and Powell's son Michael.

Powell died Oct. 18 of complications from COVID-19 at age 84. He had been vaccinated against the coronavirus, but his family said his immune system had been compromised by multiple myeloma, a blood cancer for which he had been undergoing treatment.

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The story of Powell's rise to prominence in American life is a historic example to many.

In his autobiography, "My American Journey," Powell recalled a post-Depression Era childhood in the Hunts Point section of New York City's South Bronx, where he was a mediocre student — happy-go-lucky but aimless.

He caught the military bug during his first year at the City College of New York in 1954. Powell was inspired by seeing fellow students in uniform, and he enrolled in the school's Reserve Officer Training Corps.

"I felt distinctive" in uniform, he wrote. He would go on to achieve distinction in a pioneering Army career.

Although he was only 4 when the United States entered World War II, he had vivid memories of the war years. "I deployed legions of lead soldiers and directed battles on the living room rug," he wrote — a fantasy forerunner of his Army years.

Powell would serve 35 years in uniform. Commissioned in 1958 as a second lieutenant, he served as a platoon leader in what was then called West Germany, and in 1962 was deployed to Vietnam for a year as an adviser to a South Vietnamese infantry battalion. During that tour he was wounded; he served a second tour in Vietnam in 1968 and afterward held a variety of assignments at home and abroad.

He distinguished himself at the Pentagon even before he attained flag officer rank. In the late 1970s he worked in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and in 1983 as a brigadier general he became the senior military assistant to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger. He later served in the White House as President Ronald Reagan's national security adviser, and in 1989 he was promoted to four-star general. Later that year, President George H.W. Bush selected him to be chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

"He was such a favorite of presidents that he earned the Presidential Medal of Freedom — twice," former President George W. Bush said when Powell's death was announced.

It was a trailblazing American dream journey that won him international acclaim and trust.

He put that credibility on the line in February 2003 when, appearing before the United Nations as secretary of state, he made the case for war against Iraq. When it turned out that the intelligence he cited was faulty and the Iraq War became a bloody, chaotic nightmare, Powell's stellar reputation was damaged.

Still, it wasn't destroyed. After leaving government, he became an elder statesman on the global stage and the founder of an organization aimed at helping young disadvantaged Americans. Republicans wanted him to run for president. After becoming disillusioned with his party, he ended up endorsing the last three Democratic presidential candidates, who welcomed his support.

Powell's influence was felt at the highest levels of the U.S. defense establishment long after he retired from public life. Lloyd Austin, who in January became the first Black secretary of defense, called Powell a friend and professional mentor. Like Powell, Austin rose through the ranks of the Army to become a four-star general.

On the day of Powell's death, Austin called him "one of the greatest leaders that we have ever witnessed."

Powell was among several prominent national security leaders to die this year, including George Shultz, whose served in President Ronald Reagan's Cabinet and was secretary of state under President George H.W. Bush; and Donald H. Rumsfeld, who served twice as secretary of defense. Just weeks before Powell's death, a former commander of U.S. forces in Iraq, Army Gen. Raymond Odierno, died of cancer.

Biden's big bill on brink of House votes, but fights remain

By LISA MASCARO and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats in the House appear on the verge of advancing President Joe Biden's \$1.85 trillion-and-growing domestic policy package alongside a companion \$1 trillion infrastructure bill in what would be a dramatic political accomplishment — if they can push it to passage.

The House scrapped votes late Thursday but will be back at it early Friday, and White House officials worked the phones to lock in support for the president's signature proposal. After months of negotiations, House passage of the big bill would be a crucial step, sending to the Senate Biden's ambitious effort to expand health care, child care and other social services for countless Americans and deliver the nation's biggest investment yet to fight climate change.

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Alongside the slimmer roads-bridges-and-broadband package, it adds up to Biden's answer to his campaign promise to rebuild the country from the COVID-19 crisis and confront a changing economy.

But they're not there yet.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi worked furiously into the night at the Capitol Thursday and kept the House late to shore up votes. The party has been here before, another politically messy day like many before that are being blamed for the Democrats' dismal showing in this week's elections. On and off Capitol Hill, party leaders declared it's time for Congress to deliver on Biden's agenda.

"We're going to pass both bills," Pelosi insisted at a midday press briefing.

Her strategy now seems focused on passing the most robust bill possible in her chamber and then leaving the Senate to adjust or strip out the portions its members won't agree to. The House Rules Committee processed final revisions including to a state-and-local tax deduction in a brief meeting late Thursday in preparation for floor votes.

Half the size of Biden's initial \$3.5 trillion package, the now sprawling 2,135-page bill has won over most of the progressive Democratic lawmakers, even though it is smaller than they wanted. But the chamber's more centrist and fiscally conservative Democrats continued to mount objections.

Overall the package remains more far-reaching than any other in decades. Republicans are fully opposed to Biden's bill, which is called the "Build Back Better Act" after the president's 2020 campaign slogan.

The package would provide large numbers of Americans with assistance to pay for health care, raising children and caring for elderly people at home.

There would be lower prescription drug costs, limiting the price of insulin to \$35 a dose, and Medicare for the first time would be able to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for prices of some other drugs, a long-sought Democratic priority.

Medicare would have a new hearing aid benefit for older Americans, and those with Medicare Part D would see their out-of-pocket prescription drug costs capped at \$2,000.

The package would provide some \$555 billion in tax breaks encouraging cleaner energy and electric vehicles, the nation's largest commitment to tackling climate change.

With a flurry of late adjustments, the Democrats added key provisions in recent days — adding back a new paid family leave program and work permits for immigrants. Late changes Thursday would lift a \$10,000 cap on state-and-local tax deductions to \$80,000.

Much of the package's cost would be covered with higher taxes on wealthier Americans, those earning more than \$400,000 a year, and a 5% surtax would be added on those making over \$10 million annually. Large corporations would face a new 15% minimum tax in an effort to stop big businesses from claiming so many deductions that they end up paying zero in taxes.

From the White House, "the president has been very clear, he wants to get this moving," said principal deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

As night fell, Democratic leaders struggled to resolve a catalog of remaining issues as lawmakers balanced the promise of Biden's sweeping vision with the realities of their home-district politics.

Biden has few votes to spare in the narrowly divided House and none when the bill ultimately arrives for consideration in the evenly split 50-50 Senate.

Five centrist Democratic lawmakers want a full budgetary assessment before they vote. Others from more Republican-leaning regions are objecting to a new state-and-local tax deduction that favors New York, California and other high-tax states. Another group wants changes to the immigration-related provisions.

In recent days, both the overall price tag and the revenue to pay for it have grown. A new White House assessment Thursday said revenue from the taxes on corporations and the wealthy and other changes are estimated to bring in \$2.1 trillion over 10 years, according to a summary obtained by The Associated Press. That's up from what had been \$1.9 trillion in earlier estimates.

Pelosi noted a similar assessment Thursday by the bipartisan Joint Committee on Taxation, and she echoed Biden's frequent comment that the overall package will be fully paid for.

But another model from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania suggested a shortfall in

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revenue for covering the cost, breeding fresh doubts among some of the Democratic lawmakers.

Still, the Democrats in the House are anxious to finish up this week, eager to deliver on the president's agenda and, as some lawmakers prepare to depart for a global climate change summit in Scotland, show the U.S. taking the environmental issue seriously.

Democrats have been working to resolve their differences, particularly with holdout Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who forced cutbacks to Biden's bill but championed the slimmer infrastructure package that had stalled amid deliberations.

Manchin has panned the new family and medical leave program, which is expected to provide four weeks of paid time off after childbirth, for recovery from major illness or for caring for family members, less than the 12-week program once envisioned.

Senators are also likely to strip out a just-added immigration provision that would create a new program for some 7 million immigrants who are in the country without legal standing, allowing them to apply for permits to work and travel in the U.S. for five years. It's not clear that addition would pass muster with the Senate parliamentarian under special budget rules being used to process the package.

On another remaining issue, Democrats are still arguing over a plan partly to do away with the \$10,000 limit on state and local tax deductions that particularly hits high-tax states and was enacted as part of the Trump-era 2017 tax plan.

While repeal of the so-called SALT deduction cap is a priority for several Northeastern state lawmakers, progressives wanted to prevent the super-wealthy from benefiting. Under the revised plan, the \$10,000 deduction cap would be lifted to \$80,000 for nine years, starting with the 2021 tax year.

Associated Press writers Farnoush Amiri, Kevin Freking, Amer Madhani and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

China LGBT rights group shuts down amid hostile environment

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — An influential LGBT advocacy group in China that has spearheaded many of the legal cases pushing for greater rights is halting its work amid growing restrictions on social activism.

LGBT Rights Advocacy China announced it was ceasing all activities and shutting down its social media accounts in an announcement on social media Thursday.

"We are deeply regretful to tell everyone, Queer Advocacy Online will stop all of our work indefinitely," the group said on WeChat, using the name of its social media account. It closed its accounts on WeChat and Weibo, two widely used platforms in China.

A member confirmed that all the group's activities have been shut down. The member, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because of safety concerns, declined to say why. Group founder Peng Yanzi did not respond to a request for comment.

LGBT Rights Advocacy China did work across the country, pushing for the rights of gay people and raising awareness about the community. It advocated for same-sex marriage and fought workplace discrimination by helping individuals sue their former employers.

While there are many other groups focused on helping LGBT individuals, LGBT Rights Advocacy is one of a handful who focused on changing law and policy.

The Ministry of Civil Affairs announced Friday that they have dealt with 3,300 illegal social organizations, according to the official Xinhua News Agency. The ministry also shut down some 200 illegal websites and individual social media accounts that were not registered with any government entity.

It is unclear if the group was shut down as part of the government campaign. The ministry did not immediately respond to a faxed request for comment.

The group mentioned they were in trouble a few months ago, said a 30-year-old LGBT activist who knows the group's founders and who spoke on condition of anonymity. Lawyers who helped the group with cases had also stopped their work then.

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LGBT Rights Advocacy China was co-founded by Peng and another activist named AQiang in 2013, and focused their efforts on securing legal rights for LGBT individuals through strategic lawsuits.

One of their most high profile cases came early on in 2014, when Peng himself went undercover to a facility that claimed it could "treat" homosexuality with electroshock therapy. He sued the company and won.

The group often brought landmark cases to the court, challenging the law to make space for non-traditional families, and often helped start public discussions on those issues.

In April last year, they helped a lesbian sue for custody rights for her children, after her partner took them and stopped communicating with her. She had given birth to one of the two children. Under Chinese law, she could claim she was the birth mother of one child, but wanted to fight for the right to see the other as well. Her case is still lingering in court.

The group also helped a young woman sue textbook publishers for writing that homosexuality was a disorder in a high profile case that gained national prominence and was reported on by state media. She lost the case in February, after years of litigation.

"In the entire community, they gave us a lot of hope and guidance, giving everyone the confidence to go out there and do something" said a 34-year-old man, who sued his former employer in 2018 for discrimination and won with the help of the group. He declined to be named out of fear of retribution, citing the current environment.

Homosexuality is not a crime in China, and in bigger cities, there's a vibrant social scene where LGBT individuals can socialize without much fear or discrimination. However, restrictions on advocacy groups and online censorship have grown.

In July, WeChat shut down dozens of accounts run by university students and non-profit groups on LGBT topics.

One LGBT blogger, who also declined to be named out of fear of retribution, said it's getting increasingly difficult to run an LGBT group in current circumstances, noting that WeChat and other social media platforms are deleting related content.

Shanghai Pride canceled its annual event in 2020 and said it would no longer hold it without explanation after 11 years of operation.

Another well-known group, True Self, which often held events to teach families how to accept their LGBT children, would tell people to not mention the word "gay" in publicizing their events, said the man who had previously sued his employer for discrimination. "The space for acceptance for sexual minorities is less and less, it's not like before."

Pandemic restrictions also played a role in cutting down on the number of events the groups would hold, he added.

For now, groups are struggling to operate within the constraints.

"The future may bring more uncertainties, we await the day when we can lift the clouds and see the daylight," LGBT Rights Advocacy China said in their post.

Associated Press news assistant Caroline Chen in Beijing contributed to this report.

Bosnian doctors brace for new wave as virus rages in region

BANJA LUKA, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Watching with fear as the coronavirus rages in neighboring countries, doctors in Bosnia are bracing for a new wave in the Balkan nation, which has a low vaccination rate and has been among the hardest hit countries in Europe earlier in the pandemic.

In the northwestern town of Banja Luka, staff in the COVID-19 ward of the city's main hospital warn that hospitalizations have been increasing in the past days and could explode soon.

Other low-vaccination countries throughout Central and Eastern Europe already have been grappling with a surge in infections that has lasted for weeks now, including Bosnia's neighbors Serbia and Croatia. Some countries have seen the highest numbers since the start of the pandemic, forcing the authorities to reluctantly contemplate tightening of anti-virus rules.

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"What we have noticed in past days is that the epidemic situation is getting worse, we can surely say that," said Danijel Djokic, head of the COVID-19 ward at Banja Luka's University Clinical Center.

"Looking at the situation in neighboring countries we can say that our numbers will increase too," he told The Associated Press on Thursday.

The hospital has a basic 300-bed capacity for COVID patients, and 223 have been filled already, including 32 in intensive care. During previous surges, the hospital has managed to gradually expand its capacity to some 700 beds when needed.

An increase in new infections has been reported in other parts of Bosnia too, with around 1,000 new daily infections confirmed on Thursday.

In response, authorities in the capital Sarajevo have expanded vaccination possibilities, instructed schools to organize vaccination courses and announced that they are monitoring the situation for possible new restrictions if infections spin out of control.

In most Central and Eastern European countries, governments have been reluctant to revert to lockdowns, hoping instead to boost vaccination with COVID-19 passes and pro-vaccination appeals. Bosnia's vaccination rate stands at around 20% of the population of 3.2 million, which is among the lowest in Europe.

Doctors in Banja Luka said that most of their current patients have not been vaccinated at all or have received only one dose. Vaccinated people who end up in the hospital are usually older and still have a better clinical situation that generally does not end fatally, said doctor Djokic.

"I would like to use the opportunity to stress again that vaccination, with any vaccine really, is the only and safest way to battle the COVID-19 infection and this pandemic," he said.

Still struggling after it was devastated in a 1992-95 war which killed more than 100,000 people, Bosnia has struggled during the pandemic. An already poor health system has been further plagued with reports of corruption in procurement of equipment for COVID-19 wards, triggering a probe by the state prosecutor's office.

So far, Bosnia has had more than 250,000 confirmed infections and more than 11,000 deaths, which is among the highest death rates in Europe per capita.

"If I was not vaccinated I would probably have a hard time pulling through," Marinko Ucur, a patient told the AP from his hospital bed, speaking with an oxygen mask. "The effects of the disease would have been much harder on me."

Ucur said that he had been paying attention to measures and protection from the virus and still got infected.

"I have no idea how I got it," he said. "I only know that this delta variant is very infectious and that people are contracting it very fast."

Apart from low vaccination rates, experts have blamed the latest soaring infections in the region on the highly contagious delta variant amid widespread disrespect of common anti-virus recommendations to people to wear face masks indoors, distance and avoid crowds.

Another COVID-19 patient in Banja Luka, Rajko Milunovic, 43, said he has not been vaccinated but will do so immediately after getting out of the hospital. Many in Bosnia are vaccine sceptics out of general mistrust in the authorities and floating conspiracy theories against vaccination.

"Only when you feel this disease on your skin, on yourself, then you realize how dangerous it is," he said. "I see it all clearly now. As soon as I get out of here I will get vaccinated. I think that the vaccine is a good thing."

Follow AP's pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

Report: US cancels vaccine maker's multimillion dollar deal

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal government has canceled a multimillion dollar deal with Emergent BioSolutions, a Maryland-based vaccine manufacturer with facilities in Baltimore that were found to have produced millions of contaminated Johnson & Johnson vaccine doses this spring, the Washington Post

reported.

Emergent disclosed the development Thursday in a conference call discussing its latest financial results, the Post reported. Emergent said it will forgo about \$180 million due to the contract's termination, according to the Post.

Emergent BioSolutions played a role in the Trump administration's effort to speed up vaccine development and distribution. But after winning a contract from the previous administration, Emergent quickly ran into production problems.

In March, ingredients intended for use in producing the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine shots contaminated 15 million doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine. The problems with the vaccines caused a monthslong delay in production.

After that, the Biden administration put Johnson & Johnson in direct control of vaccine production there.

In June, the Food and Drug Administration decided to discard at least another 60 million additional doses of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine produced at the plant.

The lapses at the Bayview factory in Baltimore hampered J&J's efforts to be a major player in vaccinating people, particularly in remote areas and poor countries. It only requires one dose and standard refrigeration and it's also cheaper than some other vaccines. But there have been problems with the Emergent plant.

The FDA repeatedly cited Emergent in the past for problems such as poorly trained employees, cracked vials and problems managing mold and other contamination around one of its facilities, according to records obtained by The Associated Press.

A rebel, a bureaucrat: The women who stayed in Afghanistan

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Two women from different walks of life — one a rebel, the other a bureaucrat — face an unknown future in Afghanistan. One decided to work with the Taliban, the other is determined to fight them. Both vow they will never leave their homeland.

Karima Mayar Amiri, 54, heads a department in the Taliban-run Health Ministry. She is among the few women able to retain a leadership position in the new government's bureaucracy and believes Afghans must be served no matter who is at the helm.

Many years her junior, Rishmin Juyunda, 26, could not disagree more. Afghan women will never be served with the Taliban in power, she says. The rights activist is part of an underground network determined to fight harsh Taliban policies that restrict women's freedom.

They represent a broad spectrum of women who have remained in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan after many fled, fearing a return to the brutal repression that marked the group's previous rule in the late 1990s. The international community has linked recognition of a Taliban government to factors such as guarantees for women's rights.

It is not clear what rights women will be able to retain. Under the Taliban, women in most government ministries are now unable to work, teen-age girls are prohibited from going to school, the interim cabinet is comprised entirely of men. This deepens mistrust toward the Taliban.

But there are exceptions.

Amiri, a mother of six, retained her senior position as the director of the ministry's Quality and Safety Department after the collapse of the previous U.S.-backed government. Her case is rare; most senior female bureaucrats have been barred from work across government portfolios except for health.

She is at the office by 9 a.m. to manage a team of five. Nearly every day she meets with her Taliban-appointed superiors to review action plans to combat the spread of diseases from the coronavirus to dengue fever.

"It was not a difficult decision for me to stay. I have my own department. If they request a plan, I will provide it. The Taliban leadership wants me to work for them, and I am ready," she said. "As long as I am healthy, I will work for them, for my people, my country."

Juyunda is entering her last semester majoring in economics at Zahra University in Tehran. She chose

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to stay in the capital of Kabul and study remotely after the Taliban's August takeover. Textbooks crowd her worktable, but her focus is interrupted by a buzzing phone. In a string of WhatsApp messages, rights activists proposed slogans for the next demonstration.

Like many young women who grew up after the U.S. invasion in 2001, Juyunda's dreams were dashed overnight after the Taliban seized Kabul and consolidated control of the country. Many of her friends have left, unwilling to wait and see how the dust will settle following the dramatic U.S. exit.

She stayed. "I will never leave Afghanistan. I have to stay and make a change," she said, her lively hazel eyes framed by a scarlet headscarf.

The decision to remain came amid large-scale evacuations.

Between the Aug. 15 fall of Kabul and the final U.S. exit two weeks later, thousands of Afghans, including many women, rushed to the city's airport in a desperate attempt to get out.

Amiri chose a different path.

Three days after the Taliban overran the capital, she was back in the office to help meet the growing need in the crumbling health sector. International aid that once funded hospitals and health worker wages had stopped abruptly. Hospitals across the country were being hit hard by an economic crisis brought on by international sanctions against the Taliban.

She requested that her Taliban superiors merge her department with another to improve quality control. They approved it.

When a Talib guard attempted to inspect her bag at the ministry gate one morning, she refused and asked that a separate room be erected for female checks. They complied.

A graduate of Kabul Medical University 31 years ago, she has worked for the Health Ministry since 2004. Five health ministers have come and gone during her tenure. "Why should the Taliban be any different?" she asked.

The only change they introduced was for women to don Islamic dress. Amiri, a devout Muslim, was already in the habit of wearing a headscarf.

"Health is not political," Amiri insists. The guidelines her office formulates are sent to thousands of public hospitals, clinics and facilities across the country. "Life goes on," she says.

But for Juyunda, life will never be the same.

It took her weeks to recover from the shock of the takeover. Her family of 11 had greatly benefited after the U.S. invasion. She and her four sisters were able to attend school in Ghor province. Her parents held well-paid government jobs. She was on her way to becoming an economist brimming with ideas to improve her country.

From social media she came to know of a women's protest organized outside the Pakistan embassy in Kabul in September. Shortly after she arrived, a Taliban unit showed up and the group had to disperse. She stood there holding a sign "Education is a right" and repeated to herself, "I am strong, they are weak."

She witnessed protesters being beaten with rifles and cables. This is war, she thought.

Numbers were exchanged, and soon a network of dozens of like-minded activists was formed.

The Taliban have said they have no issue with the right to protest, but that the activists must seek their permission to demonstrate. Subsequent sit-ins have not been able to draw large numbers. But Juyunda said to seek permission from the Taliban would be an implicit acceptance of their rule.

"We will never do that," she said.

The lives of both women were shaped by Afghanistan's turbulent history.

Amiri was a gynaecologist in the conservative Wardak province, a Taliban stronghold as far back as the 1990s when the group was first in power.

To survive, she said, she made her world a little smaller.

"During that time, I went to the hospital, I treated patients, delivered babies and did surgeries, and then I went straight home. That was my life," she said.

In 2021, she reverted to the same tactic. After 3:30 p.m., she leaves the office and goes straight to her Kabul home to spend the evening with her children and grandchildren.

Juyunda's childhood was marked by the violence of the Taliban insurgency in the years after the U.S. invasion. She saw entire buildings go up in flames after rocket strikes and bombings.

At night she would sleep with a glass full of water. "I thought, if a bomb ever hit our home, I could use it to put out the flames," she recalled, smiling at the thought of her childhood naivete.

The bombs have stopped, but Juyunda's war for the rights of women continues.

Amiri, meanwhile, is hopeful. "Let's see what happens," she said.

Tigray, other groups form alliance against Ethiopian leader

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's Tigray forces are joining with other armed and opposition groups in an alliance against Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed to seek a political transition after a year of devastating war, organizers say.

The signing in Washington on Friday includes the Tigray forces that have been fighting Ethiopian and allied forces, as well as the Oromo Liberation Army now fighting alongside the Tigray forces and seven other groups from around the country.

The alliance is forming as U.S. special envoy Jeffrey Feltman is in Ethiopia's capital meeting with senior government officials amid calls for an immediate cease-fire and talks to end the war that has killed thousands of people since November 2020. The U.S. said he met with the deputy prime minister and defense and finance ministers on Thursday.

The new United Front of Ethiopian Federalist Forces seeks to "establish a transitional arrangement in Ethiopia" so the prime minister can go as soon as possible, organizer Yohanees Abraha, who is with the Tigray group, told The Associated Press late Thursday. "The next step will be, of course, to start meeting and communicating with countries, diplomats and international actors in Ethiopia and abroad."

He said the new alliance is both political and military. It has had no communication with Ethiopia's government, he added.

A spokesman for the Oromo Liberation Army, Odaa Tarbii, confirmed the new alliance. When asked whether it meant to force Abiy out, he replied that it depended on Ethiopia's government and events over the coming weeks. "Of course we prefer if there's a peaceful and orderly transition with Abiy being removed," he said.

"The goal is to be as inclusive as possible. We know this transition requires all stakeholders," he added. But as for members of the prime minister's Prosperity Party, "there would have to be a process. Many members would have to go through investigation, possibly be prosecuted" for crimes related to the war.

The spokeswoman for the prime minister, Billene Seyoum, addressed the new alliance Thursday evening when she tweeted that "any outliers that rejected the democratic processes Ethiopia embarked upon cannot be for democratization," pointing out Abiy's opening-up of political space after taking office in 2018. His reforms included welcoming some opposition groups home from exile.

The spokeswoman said she had no further comment Friday, and had no information on whether the prime minister would be meeting with the U.S. special envoy.

The OLA spokesman in reply to her tweet noted that some of the people who returned to Ethiopia were later put in prison or under house arrest. "A lot of goodwill was lost over the last three years," he said.

Other groups signing on Friday include the Afar Revolutionary Democratic Unity Front, Agaw Democratic Movement, Benishangul People's Liberation Movement, Gambella Peoples Liberation Army, Global Kimant People Right and Justice Movement/ Kimant Democratic Party, Sidama National Liberation Front and Somali State Resistance, according to organizers.

Hamas 'guardian' law keeps Gaza woman from studying abroad

By FARES AKRAM Associated Press

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip (AP) — Afaf al-Najar had found a way out of Gaza.

The 19-year-old won a scholarship to study communications in Turkey, secured all the necessary travel

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documents and even paid \$500 to skip the long lines at the Rafah crossing with Egypt.

But when she arrived at the border on Sept. 21 she was turned back — not by Israel or Egypt, which have imposed a 14-year blockade on the Gaza Strip — but because of a male guardianship law enacted by the Islamic militant group Hamas, which rules the territory.

"I honestly broke down," she said, describing the moment border officials removed her luggage from the bus. "My eyes started pouring, I could not even stand up. They had to bring a chair for me... I felt my dream is being robbed."

Travel in and out of Gaza, a coastal territory that is home to more than 2 million Palestinians, has been severely restricted since 2007, when Hamas seized power from rival Palestinian forces. Israel, which has fought four wars with Hamas, most recently in May, says the blockade is needed to keep the militants from rearming. Critics view it as a form of collective punishment.

Hamas has repeatedly demanded the lifting of the blockade. But in February, an Islamic court run by Hamas issued a notice saying that unaccompanied women must get permission from a male "guardian" — a husband, relative, or even a son — to travel outside the territory.

After a backlash led by human rights groups, Hamas authorities amended the ruling to drop the requirement. Instead, it said that a male relative can petition a court to prevent a woman from traveling if it would result in "absolute harm." Women cannot prevent men from traveling.

Hamas has only taken sporadic steps over the years to impose Sharia, or Islamic law, on already conservative Gaza, and even then has usually backed down in the face of criticism. It does not share the extreme ideology of more radical factions such as the Islamic State group.

But the amended law has remained in effect.

Al-Najar's father filed a petition, and the court prevented her from traveling so that it could consider it. She lives with her mother, who is separated from her father, and says he cut off all contact with her in May. He could not be reached for comment.

Hamas officials did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Human Rights Watch, a New York-based group that is deeply critical of the blockade, called on Hamas to lift its restrictions.

"Hamas's authorities should lift the travel ban on Afaf al-Najar and the Supreme Judicial Council should withdraw its notice, so that women in Gaza can travel without discriminatory restrictions," it said.

After being turned back at the border, al-Najar appealed to a number of local human rights groups, but said they appeared reluctant to assist her, fearing reprisal from Hamas. Eventually, she filed a petition against the ban.

Her father failed to show up at the first hearing, causing it to be postponed. Before it adjourned, the judge asked her why she was going abroad and suggested she could just as easily study in one of Gaza's universities.

Al-Najar, who speaks fluent English and teaches the language, aspires to be a journalist. She says a multi-cultural country like Turkey provides opportunities that don't exist in Gaza, which is largely cut off from the outside world.

The hearing was postponed a second time because her father's attorney was sick. It was postponed a third time on Wednesday because his new lawyer said he needed time to study the case.

The scholarship's validity was extended until the end of the year, but if al-Najar does not make it to Turkey by then, she will lose it.

But she's not giving up.

"I realized no one is going to help me but myself, and I realized that I have to be strong now to fight for my rights," she said. "Instead of crying in my room and letting myself down, I decided to fight. I chose to fight for the first time in my life."

Trial in Ahmaud Arbery's death scheduled to begin in Georgia

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

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BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — Three white men are to stand trial Friday for chasing and killing Ahmaud Arbery, a 25-year-old Black man whose death was largely ignored until a leaked cellphone video stirred outrage over the shooting and deepened the national outcry over racial injustice.

Greg McMichael and his adult son, Travis McMichael, armed themselves and pursued Arbery in a pickup truck after they spotted him running in their neighborhood just outside the Georgia port city of Brunswick on Feb. 23, 2020. A neighbor, William “Roddie” Bryan, joined the chase and recorded graphic video of Travis McMichael shooting Arbery three times with a shotgun.

The killing has become part of a broader reckoning on racial injustice in the criminal legal system after a string of fatal encounters between police and Black people such as George Floyd in Minnesota and Breonna Taylor in Kentucky.

Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley planned to have the trial jury sworn in Friday to hear opening statements from prosecutors and defense attorneys. All three defendants are standing trial together, charged with murder and other felony counts.

Arbery had been dead for more than two months before the McMichaels and Bryan were charged and jailed last year. Greg McMichael, a retired investigator for the local district attorney, told police the men were trying to stop Arbery because they suspected he was a burglar. Security cameras had recorded him entering a nearby house under construction.

Greg McMichael said his son had killed Arbery in self-defense after Arbery attacked with his fists and tried to take Travis McMichael’s gun.

Prosecutors say Arbery was merely out jogging, was unarmed and had committed no crimes in the neighborhood. When Bryan’s video of the killing leaked online in May 2020, the Georgia Bureau of Investigation took over the case from local police. Its agents arrested the McMichaels the next day, and charged Bryan two weeks later.

The killing of Arbery has dominated news stories and social media feeds in Brunswick and surrounding Glynn County, a coastal community of about 85,000 people.

It took the judge and attorneys 2 1/2 weeks to select a jury. Nearly 200 people summoned to jury duty were questioned extensively about what they knew about the case, how many times they had seen the video and if they had any personal connection to Arbery or the defendants.

Controversy erupted on Wednesday, the final day of jury selection, when prosecutors objected to a final jury consisting of 11 whites and one Black juror. They argued that defense attorneys had cut eight potential jurors from the final panel because they are Black, which the U.S. Supreme Court has declared unconstitutional.

The judge agreed there appeared to be “intentional discrimination,” but said Georgia law limited his authority to intervene because defense attorneys stated non-racial reasons for excluding Black panelists from the jury.

One juror, a white woman, was dismissed Thursday for medical reasons. Fifteen total panelists will hear the trial — 12 jurors plus three alternates. The judge has not given the races of the alternate jurors, and they were not asked to state their race in open court.

Court officials have said the trial could last two weeks or more.

If the defendants are acquitted, their legal troubles won’t be over. They have also been indicted on federal hate crime charges. A U.S. District Court judge has scheduled that trial to begin Feb. 7.

Western Australia sets 90% vaccination target for reopening

By ROD MCGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — While people are now able to travel freely in Australia’s more populated east, COVID-19-free Western Australia will maintain its tight restrictions into next year, state leaders said Friday.

Western Australia is the largest state, covering a third of Australia’s land area. It also has the nation’s lowest vaccination rates, in part because the state has had few infections and life has been relatively normal throughout the pandemic.

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Western Australia is the only Australian state or territory that does not intend to reopen this year. Vaccinated Australians have been free to travel the world through east coast airports in coronavirus-affected Sydney and Melbourne since Monday when a 20-month-old international travel ban was lifted.

Western Australia Premier Mark McGowan on Friday set a vaccination target of 90% of the population aged 12 and older for the border restrictions to be relaxed. The milestone was forecast to be reached in late January or early February.

McGowan said he would set a date for the state to reopen once 80% of the target population had been vaccinated, which is expected to happen in mid-December.

Once that reopening date was set, it would stand even if the vaccination rate fell short of 90% by then.

"As far as world standards go, a rate of 90% will be an amazing achievement," McGowan said.

"Given our current vaccination rates, these targets are realistic and within our sights," he added.

Only 63.7% of the target population in Western Australia was fully vaccinated, according to state data. Nationally, 79.6% of the population aged 16 and older were fully vaccinated, according to federal government data released on Friday.

Other states have or intend to substantially relax pandemic restrictions once 80% of their populations aged 16 and older are vaccinated.

Western Australia's sparsely populated north has some of the lowest vaccination rates in the country.

McGowan said parts of the state could be isolated by intrastate borders if their vaccination rates continued to lag. Such areas include the Pilbara region where the nation's lucrative iron ore mining operations are based.

"Cutting off the Pilbara, or any region for that matter, is not something I want to do," McGowan said.

"But if that's what is required to protect the local community and local industries, then we will take that step based on the health advice at the time," he added.

Government modeling showed that reopening that state at the 90% vaccination benchmark rather than 80% would mean COVID-19 cases occupying 70% fewer hospital beds, 75% fewer intensive care beds and 63% fewer deaths, McGowan said.

"The difference in easing border controls at 90% rather than 80% is 200 West Australian lives are saved," McGowan said.

If the state falls short of the 250,000 additional people it needs to get vaccinated to reach the 90% target, additional pandemic measures will be required on the date it reopens, McGowan said.

Western Australia has accounted for only nine of Australia's 1,781 COVID-19 deaths.

Four of those deaths were passengers and crew from the German-operated cruise ship MV Artania who were brought ashore for hospital treatment in the capital Perth. The state's last COVID-19 death was reported in April 2020.

Adams, Bragg win NYC election amid historic Black leadership

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When New Yorkers this week chose Eric Adams as their next mayor and Alvin Bragg as the next Manhattan district attorney, they elevated two more Black men into high office at a time when the city and state are being led by a historic number of Black leaders.

It's a moment African American officials say has been a long time coming, made possible by an earlier generation of trailblazers who broke barriers in the face of immense bias and carried the burden of being the first.

U.S. Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, one of a record seven Black people now representing New York in Congress, said the new mayor and prosecutor will be "transformational figures."

"The emergence of individuals like Eric Adams and Alvin Bragg follow in a long tradition of leaders who emerge from the fiery furnace of the Black experience in New York City, particularly in some of our toughest neighborhoods, to become public servants committed to doing a great deal of good for everyone," said Jeffries.

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Nearly 28 years after David Dinkins ended his single term as New York's first Black mayor, the halls of power in the city and state are packed with Black leaders from the city or its suburbs, including three of the state's most powerful politicians: Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins, Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie and Letitia James, the state's first Black attorney general who is now running for governor.

A majority of the city's borough presidents are now Black, as well as several top prosecutors, including both of its appointed U.S. attorneys, and its elected public advocate, Jumaane Williams, who is also considering a gubernatorial run.

The change has happened even as the number of Black people living in New York City has declined, falling by 4.5% since 2010 even as the city's overall population grew.

According to the 2020 census, 20% of New Yorkers are Black, 31% are non-Hispanic white, 28% are Hispanic and around 16% Asian.

Bronx District Attorney Darcel Clark, who in 2015 became the state's first African-American woman elected as a DA, said the historic wave of Black leadership is both long overdue and timely following the national racial reckoning that occurred in 2020 after the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

"I think the more we can have people that look like the people and the communities that we serve, the better. I should not be the only one," she said.

New York Lt. Gov. Brian Benjamin, who became the second Black person to hold that role when he was appointed in September, recalled a recent political rally in Harlem attended by federal, state and local African American elected officials and candidates.

"There were young Black boys and young Black girls who were able to look at us and say, 'Oh wow. This is normal. I can do this. I can be a mayor. I can be lieutenant governor. I can be a congressperson,'" Benjamin said.

Many of the Black politicians, including Adams and Bragg, drew upon their life stories as they campaigned, describing firsthand experience with inequity, racism or unequal and brutal treatment from the criminal justice system.

Adams talked about growing up poor and experiencing brutality as a teenager at the hands of police before becoming a police officer himself. He became a captain and an outspoken activist calling out injustices in the New York Police Department.

Bragg, a civil rights lawyer and former federal prosecutor, talked about being held at gunpoint by both crooks and police officers during his youth in Harlem.

Days before he was elected district attorney, he was questioning New York City police officers as part of a judicial inquiry into the 2014 police chokehold death of Eric Garner, whose pleas of "I can't breathe" became a rallying cry of the Black Lives Matter movement.

Donovan Richards Jr., who last year became the first Black man elected as Queens borough president, said that in the past, he and other Black politicians were often told: "Don't talk about your Blackness. Don't talk about where you're from."

"Often we're told to shy away from who we are, to shy away from our stories, especially as Black men. You need to smile a little more in your pictures," Richards said. "I think we have changed the narrative."

New Yorkers on Tuesday elected an Afro-Caribbean of Dominican heritage, City Council Member Antonio Reynoso, to replace Adams as Brooklyn borough president. Across town, City Council Member Vanessa Gibson became the first Black woman elected Bronx borough president.

Richards said there's also a huge burden with being the first — or even the second — person of color to hold an elected office.

"It's a lot of pressure," he said. "You don't get to settle in and you can't make mistakes."

Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. became the first African American to represent New York in Congress in 1945. Shirley Chisholm became the first Black woman elected to Congress from any state in 1969. Both faced immense challenges because of racism.

Even though earlier African American leaders paved the way, Richards said he, Adams, Bragg and other Black leaders today still face bias and microaggressions after winning top offices.

Richards said that when he first took office, he was stopped several days in a row at the entrance to

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borough hall by a security guard asking to see some identification. Richards explained he was the borough president.

"Then he says, 'You're the borough president?' I said, 'Yes. Get used to it,'" Richards recalled, with a laugh.

Associated Press writer Michael R. Sisak contributed to this report.

"No photo!": A visual essay of Haiti

By The Associated Press undefined

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti is not one story. It is many stories -- overlapping, colliding, advancing relentlessly to violent and heartbreaking endings.

The rich and the desperately poor. The brutal and the brutalized. Uneasily and sometimes murderously, they share half an island that is a magnet for natural disasters.

Photographer Roberto Abd, working with reporter Alberto Arce, spent four weeks in Haiti and came away with a kaleidoscopic collection of images -- fragments of slices of life in a tumultuous land.

This story was produced with support from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

From the beginning, they spent days riding a motorbike around garbage-strewn, dirt streets of the violent, coastal neighborhoods of Cité Soleil, La Saline, Bel Air, and Martissant.

One Saturday evening, after a shootout between policemen and a gang, Abd saw a corpse laying face-down in the street with passersby averting their gazes in a common form of self-defense: See no evil to save yourself.

The pedestrians also covered their faces in the presence of a photographer. Abd quickly learned that most Haitians, but particularly the poor, didn't want to be photographed — not by a white man and certainly not for free.

"No photo. No money. I want no pictures. I don't want to see you. I don't want to talk to you." These were the phrases Abd heard over and over.

The measures that had served him well during two decades of photojournalism -- seeking permission, demonstrating respect and empathy — were not going to be enough in Haiti. Abd encountered constant hostility, even violence, toward a white man with a camera.

On the other hand, Abd won rare access to the homes of the well-to-do who live in Pétiön-Ville, on the top of a mountain overlooking the bay of Port-au-Prince.

In the past, they have been reluctant to show their faces and lifestyles to the media, but now they want to be seen. They feel they have something to say. Following the assassination of President Jovenel Moïse last summer, many among the elite have given up hope and abandoned the island. Some are still here and still doing business.

"Once you have invested in a place and a hundred workers depend on you, how can you leave? There is no way back," said one who remained behind.

In the dense gardens of La Reserve restaurant, contestants in a beauty pageant also want to be seen. They aspire to the title of Miss Haiti to represent their country at the Miss World contest. They rehearse on a catwalk, practiced elegance protected from gangs by armed guards around the perimeter.

The contrasts are poignant.

On one of his last days in Haiti, Abd traveled past the last shantytowns of Port au Prince to a previously agreed meeting point north of the airport, where three gang members appeared from behind a cluster of trees. Their faces were covered by rolled up T-shirts and their distrust was such that they asked Abd to lift his shirt: they were not checking for guns but for a hidden camera.

The gang members wanted to convey a message: There is no pride in being a gunman. There is no work, there are no opportunities. If there were, they would not do what they do.

For these young people, the last in line, gangs are the only way to work in Haiti, a homeland swallowed

by poverty.

Throughout his time in Haiti, Abd moved about with his hand on his camera, but even before he could raise it he would hear the chorus of "No photo!" It came from the people he was talking to and from those just passing by. Many also wouldn't give their names. They would consider trading a picture for cash, but no cash, no photo. The message was clear. Why would they help a foreign journalist make money off of their image while they have little to eat? They had nothing else to sell.

They also make a gesture along with "No photo!" — a finger drawn across the neck from left to right, like a fatal knife slice. Abd saw it many times. And he understood. It may be a death threat, but it's also a statement of need, an indication that while the photographer is bent on capturing the moment, the person he sees in the viewfinder has more basic needs.

And for the moment, that person controls his own story.

After Virginia, GOP amplifies debate over race and education

By THOMAS BEAUMONT, AARON MORRISON and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans plan to forcefully oppose race and diversity curricula — tapping into a surge of parental frustration about public schools — as a core piece of their strategy in the 2022 midterm elections, a coordinated effort to supercharge a message that mobilized right-leaning voters in Virginia this week and which Democrats dismiss as race-baiting.

Coming out of Tuesday's elections, in which Republican Glenn Youngkin won the governor's office after aligning with conservative parent groups, the GOP signaled that it saw the fight over teaching about racism as a political winner. Indiana Rep. Jim Banks, chairman of the conservative House Study Committee, issued a memo suggesting "Republicans can and must become the party of parents." House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy announced support for a "Parents' Bill of Rights" opposing the teaching of "critical race theory," an academic framework about systemic racism that has become a catch-all phrase for teaching about race in U.S. history.

"Parents are angry at what they view as inappropriate social engineering in schools and an unresponsive bureaucracy," said Phil Cox, a former executive director of the Republican Governors Association.

Democrats were wrestling with how to counter that message. Some dismissed it, saying it won't have much appeal beyond the GOP's most conservative base. Others argued the party ignores the power of cultural and racially divisive debates at its peril.

They pointed to Republicans' use of the "defund the police" slogan to hammer Democrats and try to alarm white, suburban voters after the demonstrations against police brutality and racism that began in Minneapolis after the killing of George Floyd. Some Democrats blame the phrase, an idea few in the party actually supported, for contributing to losses in House races last year.

If the party can't find an effective response, it could lose its narrow majorities in both congressional chambers next November.

The debate comes as the racial justice movement that surged in 2020 was reckoning with losses — a defeated ballot question on remaking policing in Minneapolis, and a series of local elections where voters turned away from candidates who were most vocal about battling institutional racism.

"This happened because of a backlash against what happened last year," said Bernice King, the daughter of the late civil rights leader Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. who runs Atlanta's King Center.

King warned attempts to roll back social justice advances are "not something that we should sleep on."

"We have to be constantly vigilant, constantly aware," she said, "and collectively apply the necessary pressure where it needs to be applied to ensure that this nation continues to progress."

Banks' memo included a series of recommendations on how Republicans aim to mobilize parents next year, and many touch openly on race. He proposed banning federal funding supporting critical race theory and emphasizing legislation ensuring schools are spending money on gifted and talented and advanced placement programs "instead of exploding Diversity, Equity and Inclusion administrators."

Democrats plan to combat such efforts by noting that many top Republicans' underlying goal is removing

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government funding from public schools and giving it to private and religious alternatives. They also see the school culture war squabbles as likely to alienate most voters since the vast majority of the nation's children attend public schools.

"I think Republicans can, will continue to try to divide us and don't have an answer for real questions about education," said Marshall Cohen, the Democratic Governors Association's political director. "Like their plan to cut public school funding and give it to private schools."

White House deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre accused Republicans of "cynically trying to use our kids as a political football." But Jean-Pierre also took on conservatives' critique that critical race theory teaches white children to be ashamed of their country.

"Great countries are honest, right? They have to be honest with themselves about the history, which is good and the bad," she told reporters. "And our kids should be proud to be Americans after learning that history."

Most schools don't teach critical race theory, which centers on the idea that racism is systemic in the nation's institutions and that they function to maintain the dominance of white people.

But parents organizing across the country say they see plenty of examples of how schools are overhauling the way they teach history and gender issues — which some equate with deeper social changes they do not support.

And concerns over what students are being taught — especially after remote learning amid the coronavirus pandemic exposed a larger swath of parents to curricula — led to other objections about actions taken by schools and school boards. Those including COVID safety protocols and policies regarding transgender students.

"I'm sure that most people have no problem with teaching history in a balanced way," said Georgia Democratic Rep. Hank Johnson. "But when you say critical race theory, and you say that it is attacking us and causing our children to feel bad about themselves, that is an appeal that is attractive. And, unfortunately for Democrats, it's hard to defend when someone accuses you of that."

Democrats were wiped out Tuesday in lower-profile races in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where critical race theory was a dominant issue at contentious school board meetings for much of the summer and fall.

Patrice Tisdale, a Jamaican-born candidate for magisterial district judge, said she felt the political climate was racially charged. She heard "dog whistles" from voters, who called her "antifa" and accused her of wanting to defund the police, she said. While canvassing a neighborhood in the election's closing weeks, one voter asked Tisdale whether she believed in critical race theory.

"I said, 'What does that have to do with my election?'" recalled Tisdale, an attorney, who lost her race. "I'm there all by myself running to be a judge and that was her question."

The issue had weight in Virginia, too. A majority of voters there — 7 in 10 — said racism is a serious problem in U.S. society, according to AP VoteCast, a survey of Tuesday's electorate. But 44% of voters said public schools focus "too much" on racism in the U.S., while 30% said they focus on racism "too little."

The divide along party lines was stark: 78% of Youngkin voters considered the focus on racism in schools to be too much, while 55% of voters for his opponent, Democrat Terry McAuliffe, said it was too little.

Youngkin strategist Jeff Roe described the campaign's message on education as a broad, umbrella issue that allowed the candidate to speak to different groups of voters — some worried about critical race theory, others about eliminating accelerated math classes, school safety and school choice.

"It was about parental knowledge," he said.

McAuliffe went on the attack last week, portraying Republicans as wanting to ban books. He accused Youngkin of trying to "silence" Black authors during a flareup over whether the themes in Nobel laureate's Toni Morrison's 1987 novel "Beloved" were too explicit. McAuliffe still lost a governor's race in a state President Joe Biden carried easily just last year.

Republican Minnesota Rep. Tom Emmer bristled at equating a movement to defend school "parental rights" and race.

"The way this was handled in Virginia was frankly about parents, mothers and fathers, saying we want a say in our child's education," said Emmer, chairman of the National Republican Congressional Committee.

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That didn't rattle some Democrats, who see the GOP argument as manufactured and fleeting. "Republicans are very good at creating issues," deadpanned Democratic Michigan Sen. Debbie Stabenow. "We'll have to address it, and then they'll make up something else."

Beaumont reported from Des Moines, Iowa; Morrison from New York. Associated Press writers Steve Peoples in Doylestown, Pennsylvania, Jill Colvin in New York and Kevin Freking, Mary Clare Jalonick and Hannah Fingerhut in Washington contributed to this report.

Thousands of intel officers refusing vaccine risk dismissal

By NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thousands of intelligence officers could soon face dismissal for failing to comply with the U.S. government's vaccine mandate, leading some Republican lawmakers to raise concerns about removing employees from agencies critical to national security.

Several intelligence agencies had at least 20% of their workforce unvaccinated as of late October, said U.S. Rep. Chris Stewart, a Utah Republican who is a member of the House Intelligence Committee. Some agencies in the 18-member intelligence community had as much as 40% of their workforce unvaccinated, Stewart said, citing information the administration has provided to the committee but not released publicly. He declined to identify the agencies because full information on vaccination rates was classified.

While many people will likely still get vaccinated before the administration's Nov. 22 deadline for civilian workers, resistance to the mandate could leave major agencies responsible for national security without some personnel. Intelligence officers are particularly hard to replace due to the highly specialized work they do and the difficulties of completing security clearance checks.

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence declined several requests to provide figures for the intelligence community. The office also would not say what contingency plans are in place in case officers are taken off work due to not complying with the mandate.

Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines declined at a hearing last week to disclose what percentage of the workforce had been vaccinated, but said "we are not anticipating that it is going to be an issue for mission." There are an estimated 100,000 employees in the intelligence community.

The vaccination rates provided by Stewart are mostly higher than those of the general U.S. population. About 70% of American adults are fully vaccinated and 80% have received at least one dose of a vaccine.

Stewart called on the administration to approve more exemptions for people on medical, religious and other grounds, and delay any terminations of intelligence officers.

"My question is what's the impact on national security if we do that?" Stewart said. "You're potentially firing thousands of people on the same day. And it's not like you put an ad on Craigslist and have people apply by Thursday."

President Joe Biden has issued several mandates to boost the vaccination rate in the U.S. affecting federal employees, contractors and health care workers. The White House has credited those mandates with driving up vaccination rates and reducing deaths from a pandemic that has killed more than 750,000 people in the U.S. and 5 million people worldwide.

Federal regulators and independent health experts have certified that the available vaccines are safe. A recent Centers for Disease Control and Prevention study found that from April to July, unvaccinated people were 10 times more likely than vaccinated people to be hospitalized and 11 times more likely to die of COVID-19.

Mandates to get vaccinated have faced significant resistance, particularly given an already-tight market for businesses looking to hire workers. Some first responders have resisted vaccine mandates as have employee unions, arguing that mandates impinge on personal freedom.

CIA Director William Burns disclosed publicly last week that 97% of the agency's officers have been vaccinated. The National Reconnaissance Office, which operates U.S. spy satellites, has more than 90% of its workforce vaccinated.

House Intelligence Committee Democrats say they're confident that the vaccination mandate will not

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cause a problem for the intelligence community. Rep. Jason Crow, a Colorado Democrat, said the agencies were doing "quite well" and that getting vaccinated was a sign of an employee's readiness.

"If somebody is not willing to do what's necessary to protect their own health and the health of their unit, that actually calls into question their ability to effectively do the job," Crow said in an interview.

The Biden administration classified information it gave the intelligence committee on each of the nation's 18 intelligence agencies, said Stewart, who noted generally that agencies more closely affiliated with the military tended to report lower vaccination rates.

Several major agencies with large military components all declined to provide their vaccination rate when asked by The Associated Press, including the National Security Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency and the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency. The NGA, which produces intelligence from satellites and drones, said in a statement that it was "working to ensure that all members of the workforce understand the process and documentation required" prior to the deadline.

Stewart, a former Air Force pilot, has been vaccinated, but said he opposes mandates as being intrusive and counterproductive.

"If you say, 'You have to do this and we won't consider any exceptions to that,' that's where you get people to dig in their heels," he said.

Rep. Darin LaHood, an Illinois Republican, echoed Stewart's concerns in a hearing last week and told agency leaders that the question of unvaccinated employees "affects all of you and us globally."

Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va., the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said in a statement that he supported requiring vaccinations for federal employees. "We need to be using every tool at our disposal to save lives and protect mission readiness," Warner said.

Federal employees who aren't vaccinated or haven't received an exemption by Nov. 22 could face a suspension of 14 days or fewer, followed by possible dismissal. The General Services Administration has advised agencies that "unique operational needs of agencies and the circumstances affecting a particular employee may warrant departure from these guidelines if necessary."

Steve Morrison, director of the Global Health Policy Center at the Washington-based Center for Strategic & International Studies, said the vaccine mandate was still relatively new and he expected the numbers to change before the administration's cutoff.

Morrison said that as intelligence agencies broadly work with unvaccinated employees, "they're going to have to show some flexibility around the margins without compromising away the basic strategy and goals."

"Getting control over this pandemic in the United States requires getting to a much higher level of vaccine coverage," Morrison said. "It's a matter of national security."

Biden's big bill on brink of House votes, but fights remain

By LISA MASCARO and ALAN FRAM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats in the House appear on the verge of advancing President Joe Biden's \$1.85 trillion-and-growing domestic policy package alongside a companion \$1 trillion infrastructure bill in what would be a dramatic political accomplishment — if they can push it to passage.

The House scrapped votes late Thursday but will be back at it early Friday, and White House officials worked the phones to lock in support for the president's signature proposal. After months of negotiations, House passage of the big bill would be a crucial step, sending to the Senate Biden's ambitious effort to expand health care, child care and other social services for countless Americans and deliver the nation's biggest investment yet to fight climate change.

Alongside the slimmer roads-bridges-and-broadband package, it adds up to Biden's answer to his campaign promise to rebuild the country from the COVID-19 crisis and confront a changing economy.

But they're not there yet.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi worked furiously into the night at the Capitol Thursday and kept the House late to shore up votes. The party has been here before, another politically messy day like many before that are being blamed for the Democrats' dismal showing in this week's elections. On and off Capitol Hill,

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party leaders declared it's time for Congress to deliver on Biden's agenda.

"We're going to pass both bills," Pelosi insisted at a midday press briefing.

Her strategy now seems focused on passing the most robust bill possible in her chamber and then leaving the Senate to adjust or strip out the portions its members won't agree to. The House Rules Committee processed final revisions including to a state-and-local tax deduction in a brief meeting late Thursday in preparation for floor votes.

Half the size of Biden's initial \$3.5 trillion package, the now sprawling 2,135-page bill has won over most of the progressive Democratic lawmakers, even though it is smaller than they wanted. But the chamber's more centrist and fiscally conservative Democrats continued to mount objections.

Overall the package remains more far-reaching than any other in decades. Republicans are fully opposed to Biden's bill, which is called the "Build Back Better Act" after the president's 2020 campaign slogan.

The big package would provide large numbers of Americans with assistance to pay for health care, raising children and caring for elderly people at home.

There would be lower prescription drug costs, limiting the price of insulin to \$35 a dose, and Medicare for the first time would be able to negotiate with pharmaceutical companies for prices of some other drugs, a long-sought Democratic priority.

Medicare would have a new hearing aid benefit for older Americans, and those with Medicare Part D would see their out-of-pocket prescription drug costs capped at \$2,000.

The package would provide some \$555 billion in tax breaks encouraging cleaner energy and electric vehicles, the nation's largest commitment to tackling climate change.

With a flurry of late adjustments, the Democrats added key provisions in recent days — adding back a new paid family leave program and work permits for immigrants. Late changes Thursday would lift a \$10,000 cap on state-and-local tax deductions to \$80,000.

Much of the package's cost would be covered with higher taxes on wealthier Americans, those earning more than \$400,000 a year, and a 5% surtax would be added on those making over \$10 million annually. Large corporations would face a new 15% minimum tax in an effort to stop big businesses from claiming so many deductions that they end up paying zero in taxes.

From the White House, "the president has been very clear, he wants to get this moving," said principal deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre.

As night fell, Democratic leaders struggled to resolve a catalog of remaining issues as lawmakers balanced the promise of Biden's sweeping vision with the realities of their home-district politics.

Biden has few votes to spare in the narrowly divided House and none when the bill ultimately arrives for consideration in the evenly split 50-50 Senate.

Five centrist Democratic lawmakers want a full budgetary assessment before they vote. Others from more Republican-leaning regions are objecting to a new state-and-local tax deduction that favors New York, California and other high-tax states. Another group wants changes to the immigration-related provisions.

In recent days, both the overall price tag and the revenue to pay for it have grown. A new White House assessment Thursday said revenue from the taxes on corporations and the wealthy and other changes are estimated to bring in \$2.1 trillion over 10 years, according to a summary obtained by The Associated Press. That's up from what had been \$1.9 trillion in earlier estimates.

Pelosi noted a similar assessment Thursday by the bipartisan Joint Committee on Taxation, and she echoed Biden's frequent comment that the overall package will be fully paid for.

But another model from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania suggested a shortfall in revenue for covering the cost, breeding fresh doubts among some of the Democratic lawmakers.

Still, the Democrats in the House are anxious to finish up this week, eager to deliver on the president's agenda and, as some lawmakers prepare to depart for a global climate change summit in Scotland, show the U.S. taking the environmental issue seriously.

Democrats have been working to resolve their differences, particularly with holdout Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, who forced cutbacks to Biden's bill but championed the

slimmer infrastructure package that had stalled amid deliberations.

Manchin has panned the new family and medical leave program, which is expected to provide four weeks of paid time off after childbirth, for recovery from major illness or for caring for family members, less than the 12-week program once envisioned.

Senators are also likely to strip out a just-added immigration provision that would create a new program for some 7 million immigrants who are in the country without legal standing, allowing them to apply for permits to work and travel in the U.S. for five years. It's not clear that addition would pass muster with the Senate parliamentarian under special budget rules being used to process the package.

On another remaining issue, Democrats are still arguing over a plan partly to do away with the \$10,000 limit on state and local tax deductions that particularly hits high-tax states and was enacted as part of the Trump-era 2017 tax plan.

While repeal of the so-called SALT deduction cap is a priority for several Northeastern state lawmakers, progressives wanted to prevent the super-wealthy from benefiting. Under the revised plan, the \$10,000 deduction cap would be lifted to \$80,000 for nine years, starting with the 2021 tax year.

Associated Press writers Farnoush Amiri, Kevin Freking, Amer Madhani and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

October jobs report is expected to show a pickup in hiring

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — After two disappointing months of hiring, a key question overhanging Friday's U.S. jobs report for October will be whether companies found more success this time in filling millions of open positions.

Economists have forecast that employers added roughly 400,000 jobs last month, according to a survey by the data provider FactSet. That would be a stronger showing than the average monthly gain of 280,000 in August and September, though well below the vigorous increases of about 1 million jobs each in June and July. The unemployment rate is expected to fall from 4.8% to 4.7%.

There are signs that the economy is emerging from a delta-induced slowdown and that the job market may be doing so as well. Consumer confidence rose in October after three months of declines. Services companies in such areas as retail, banking and warehousing reported a sharp jump in sales. And more Americans bought new homes last month.

Yet some companies say they still can't find enough workers to fill jobs. Many parents, particularly mothers, haven't returned to the workforce after having left jobs during the pandemic to care for children or other relatives. Defying the predictions of some, the expiration of a \$300-a-week federal unemployment supplement hasn't caused more people to look for work.

Most economists, though, say they're hopeful that with vaccinations helping to suppress the delta wave, more people will seek and find jobs because they're no longer sick or caring for someone who is or because they no longer fear becoming infected. Those health issues had sidelined more people in September than in previous months.

America's workers, who now enjoy greater leverage in the job market than they have in decades, are receiving solid pay increases. The draw of higher income could entice more people to come off the sidelines and look for work again. Wages and salaries in the July-September quarter, compared with a year earlier, jumped by the most in 20 years. Most of that gain, though, went to already employed people who left their jobs: The number of people who quit, mostly to take new positions, has reached a record high.

Rising inflation, though, has eroded much of the value of those pay increases and has become the most serious headwind for the U.S. economy. Higher costs for food, heating oil, rents and furniture have burdened millions of families. Prices rose 4.4% in September compared with 12 months earlier, the sharpest such increase in three decades.

That inflation surge was a key reason why the Federal Reserve announced this week that it would begin

winding down the stimulus it has given the economy since the pandemic recession struck last year. The Fed will do so by reducing its monthly bond purchases, which have been intended to hold down long-term interest rates to spur borrowing and spending.

Chair Jerome Powell suggested that it won't be possible to gain a clear picture of the job market's health until the impact of COVID-19 declines further, which could take months.

Yet in the meantime, there are plenty of signs that the economy is healing: The number of people applying for first-time unemployment benefits fell for a fifth straight week, to a level nearly as low as the pace of jobless claims before the pandemic struck 20 months ago.

And while hiring has slowed for now, consumer demand remains healthy. After several rounds of stimulus checks and other government support payments, Americans as a whole have amassed about \$2.5 trillion more in savings than they had before the pandemic. As that money is spent, it will likely fuel further economic activity.

The Conference Board, a business research group, said that in its October consumer confidence survey, the proportion of Americans who said they planned to buy cars, homes or major appliances all rose. And nearly half the survey respondents said they planned to vacation in the next six months — the highest proportion since February 2020, before COVID-19 ripped through the economy.

That suggests that Americans are increasingly willing to spend more on in-person services such as airline trips, movies and concerts — activity they had largely avoided during the height of COVID.

2 dead in dramatic shootout near upscale Mexican resorts

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — A commando of drug gang gunmen on Thursday stormed ashore at a beach on Mexico's resort-studded Caribbean coast in front of luxury hotels and executed two drug dealers from a rival gang.

The dramatic shooting attack sent tourists scrambling for cover at the resort of Puerto Morelos, just south of Cancun.

The two suspected drug dealers killed Thursday had apparently arrived at the beach in front of the Azul Beach Resort and the Hyatt Ziva Riviera Cancun earlier in the day, claiming it was now their territory.

"About 15 people arrived on the beach to assassinate two men who had showed up saying they were the new dealers in the area," the head prosecutor of Quintana Roo state, Oscar Montes de Oca, told the Radio Formula station.

Montes de Oca's office said earlier in a statement that "there was a clash between rival groups of drug dealers on a beach" near the hotels. Several cartels are fighting for the area's lucrative retail drug trade, including the Jalisco cartel and the a gang allied with the Gulf cartel.

Montes de Oca said one of the men targeted in the attack fled into one of the hotels before dying. The other was killed on the beach. He also said one person suffered non-life-threatening injuries in the attack, but authorities could not determine whether that person was a hotel employee or a guest because they were still undergoing medical treatment.

Gov. Carlos Joaquin said the commando wore ski masks and arrived by boat at the beach. Montes de Oca said they fled in a boat after the attack.

Joaquin called the attack "a serious blow to the development and security of the state ... putting the image of the state at grave risk."

The shootings were the latest chapter in drug gang violence that has sullied the reputation of Mexico's Caribbean coast as a once-tranquil oasis.

Guests at the Hyatt Ziva Riviera Cancun posted videos and photos of tourists hiding or nervously milling in the lobby and hallways of hotels during the incident.

Guests at the nearby Azul Beach Resort also posted videos of people taking shelter or gathering in the lobby. An employee who answered the phone at the hotel said the shooting occurred on the beach near the facility.

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Mike Sington, a guest at the Hyatt Ziva Riviera Cancun, wrote in his Twitter account that "Guests are telling me they were playing volleyball on the beach, gunman approached firing gun. Everyone ran from beach and swimming pools. Staff hustled us into hidden rooms behind the kitchens."

Sington tweeted "I've never been so scared, literally shaking," before adding "I'm fine now, barricaded in my hotel room for the night, just trying to decompress."

Rival cartels often kill another gang's street-level dealers in Mexico to eliminate competition and ensure their drugs are sold first. It is not the first time that tourists have been caught in the crossfire of such battles.

The Puerto Morelos shooting comes two weeks after a California travel blogger and a German tourist were killed in a similar shootout in the beach town of Tulum.

A San Jose, California woman born in India, Anjali Ryot, and German citizen Jennifer Henzold were apparently hit by crossfire from the Oct. 20 drug dealers' shootout in Tulum, south of Puerto Morelos.

Three other foreign tourists were wounded in the shooting at a street-side eatery that has some outdoor tables, right off Tulum's main strip. They included two German men and a Dutch woman.

The German Foreign Office issued a travel advisory about the violence, advising its citizens "if you are currently in the Tulum or Playa del Carmen area, do not leave your secured hotel facilities."

The Tulum gunfight also apparently broke out between two groups that operate street-level drug sales in the area, according to prosecutors.

Montes de Oca said eight suspects in the Tulum attack had been detained in possession of firearms.

There have been signs that the situation in Quintana Roo state, where all the resorts are located, was out of control months ago. In June, two men were shot to death on the beach in Tulum and a third was wounded.

And in nearby Playa del Carmen, police stage a massive raid in October on the beach town's restaurant-lined Quinta Avenida, detaining 26 suspects — most apparently for drug sales — after a city policewoman was shot to death and locked in the trunk of a car last week. Prosecutors said Friday they have arrested a suspect in that killing.

Crime "has gone up a little with extortion, with drug sales to foreigners and Mexicans," the prosecutors office said about the raid.

The administration of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has pinned its hopes on the so-called Maya Riviera, where it has announced plans to build an international airport and a stop for the Maya train, which will run in a loop around the Yucatan peninsula.

Analyst who aided Trump-Russia dossier charged with lying

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Russian analyst who contributed to a dossier of Democratic-funded research into ties between Russia and Donald Trump was arrested Thursday on charges of lying to the FBI about his sources of information, among them a longtime supporter of Hillary Clinton.

The case against Igor Danchenko is part of special counsel John Durham's ongoing investigation into the origins of the FBI's probe into whether Trump's 2016 campaign and Russia had conspired to tip the outcome of that year's presidential campaign.

The indictment, the third criminal case brought by Durham and the second in a two-month span, is likely to boost complaints from Trump allies that well-connected Democrats worked behind the scenes to advance suspicions about Trump and Russia that contributed to the FBI's election-year investigation.

The case does not undercut investigators' findings that the Kremlin aided the Trump campaign — conclusions that were not based on the dossier, which was barely mentioned in special counsel Robert Mueller's report. But the indictment does endorse a longstanding concern about the Russia probe: that opposition research the FBI relied on as it surveilled a Trump campaign adviser was marred by unsupported, uncorroborated claims.

The five-count indictment accuses Danchenko of making multiple false statements to the FBI when

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interviewed in 2017 about his role in collecting information for Christopher Steele, a former British spy whose research into ties between the Trump campaign and Russia was financed by Democrats.

Danchenko, a U.S.-based Russian who'd specialized in Russian and Eurasian matters as an analyst at Brookings Institution, was a significant source for Steele as Steele compiled his dossier of research. That dossier, the target of intense derision from Trump, was ultimately provided to the FBI and used by federal authorities as they applied for and received surveillance warrants targeting former Trump campaign aide Carter Page.

According to the indictment, Danchenko repeatedly lied to the FBI about his sources of information. Prosecutors say that deception mattered because the FBI "devoted substantial resources attempting to investigate and corroborate" the dossier's allegations and had "relied in large part" on that research in obtaining the surveillance warrants.

A lawyer for Danchenko had no immediate comment.

The indictment says Danchenko misled the FBI by denying that he had discussed any allegations in the dossier with a contact of his who was a public relations executive and longtime Democratic operative who volunteered for the campaign of Clinton, Trump's 2016 opponent.

In fact, the indictment says, Danchenko had sourced one or more allegations in the dossier anonymously to that Clinton associate. As the FBI worked to corroborate the dossier's allegations, it would have been important to know the Democrat's role in feeding information for it because it bore upon his "reliability, motivations, and potential bias as a source," according to the indictment.

The individual is not named in court papers, but his lawyer confirmed his identity as Charles Dolan Jr., a former executive director of the Democratic Governors Association who advised Hillary Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign and volunteered for her 2016 campaign. The lawyer, Ralph Drury Martin, declined to comment further on the ongoing investigation.

The charging documents also refer to salacious and unsupported sexual allegations involving Trump's behavior at a Moscow hotel that were included in the dossier but that Trump has vigorously disputed, including in private conversations with former FBI Director James Comey.

The indictment says Danchenko told the FBI he had collected information about Trump's activities at the hotel from multiple sources but didn't himself know if the sexual allegations were true.

According to the indictment, Dolan stayed in June 2016 at the same Moscow hotel and received a tour of the presidential suite. A hotel staff member revealed that Trump had stayed there, but Dolan and another unidentified person said the staff member didn't mention any sexual or salacious activity.

The indictment says that since Dolan "was present at places and events where Danchenko collected information" for the dossier, Danchenko's deception about his relationship with Dolan "was highly material to the FBI's investigation of these matters."

The indictment also accuses Danchenko of lying to the FBI about a July 2016 phone call he claimed he received from someone he believed to be the president of the Russian-American Chamber of Commerce. That person, according to the dossier and Danchenko's account to the FBI, told him about a "well-developed conspiracy of co-operation" between the Trump campaign and Russia — an assertion that prosecutors say "would ultimately underpin" the surveillance warrant applications.

The indictment says Danchenko fabricated his account and never actually received such a phone call.

Both the dossier and the Durham probe are politically charged.

Trump's Justice Department appointed Durham as Trump claimed the investigation of campaign ties to Russia was a witch hunt. Trump pointed to the dossier, much of which the indictment says the FBI was unable to corroborate, as evidence of a tainted probe driven by Democrats.

But the dossier had no part in launching the Trump-Russia investigation, though a 2019 Justice Department inspector general report raised significant questions about the accuracy of the information and the FBI's reliance on it. Mueller ultimately found questionable ties between the Trump campaign and Russia, but not sufficient evidence to charge a conspiracy to sway the election. Democrats have lambasted the Durham probe as politically motivated, but the Biden administration has not stopped it.

The indictment is the third criminal action from Durham.

Cybersecurity lawyer Michael Sussmann was charged in September with lying to the FBI during a 2016 conversation in which he relayed concerns about potentially suspicious cyber contacts between a Trump Organization server and the server of a Russian bank. Durham's team says he concealed from the FBI that he was passing on the concerns in his capacity as a lawyer for the Clinton campaign. He has pleaded not guilty.

Last year, Kevin Clinesmith, a former FBI lawyer, admitted altering an email related to the surveillance of Page and was given probation.

Follow Eric Tucker on Twitter at <http://www.twitter.com/etuckerAP>

Witnesses: Threat, lunge for gun from 1st Rittenhouse victim

By AMY FORLITI, TAMMY WEBBER and MICHAEL TARM Associated Press

KENOSHA, Wis. (AP) — The first man shot by Kyle Rittenhouse on the streets of Kenosha was "hyperaggressive" that night, threatened to kill Rittenhouse and later lunged for his rifle just before the 17-year-old fired, witnesses testified Thursday.

The testimony at Rittenhouse's murder trial came from two witnesses who had been called to the stand by the prosecution but gave accounts often more favorable to the defense in the politically polarizing case.

Rittenhouse, now 18, is charged with shooting three men, two of them fatally, in the summer of 2020. The aspiring police officer had gone to Kenosha with an AR-style semi-automatic rifle and a medical kit in what he said was an effort to safeguard property from violent protests that broke out over the police shooting of a Black man.

Richie McGinniss, who was recording events on a cellphone that night for the conservative website The Daily Caller, testified that Joseph Rosenbaum, the first man shot that night, was killed after chasing down Rittenhouse and making a lunge for the gun.

"I think it was very clear to me that he was reaching specifically for the weapon," McGinniss said.

Ryan Balch, a former Army infantryman who carried an AR-style rifle that night and walked around patrolling the streets with Rittenhouse, testified that Rosenbaum was "hyperaggressive and acting out in a violent manner," including trying to set fires and throwing rocks.

Balch said he got between Rosenbaum and another man while Rosenbaum was trying to start a fire, and Rosenbaum got angry, shouting, "If I catch any of you guys alone tonight I'm going to f--- kill you!"

Balch said that Rittenhouse was within earshot and that he believed the threat was aimed at both of them.

Prosecutors have portrayed Rittenhouse as the instigator of the bloodshed, while his lawyer has argued that he acted in self-defense, suggesting among other things that Rittenhouse had reason to fear his weapon would be taken away and used against him.

The killing of Rosenbaum, 36, has emerged as one of the most crucial and disputed moments of the night. It is one of the few moments not clearly captured on video.

In an attempt to undo some of the damage done by his own witness, prosecutor Thomas Binger said McGinniss' testimony about what Rosenbaum was intending to do was "complete guesswork."

"Isn't it?" he asked.

"Well," McGinniss replied, "he said, 'F--- you.' And then he reached for the weapon."

But McGinniss also appeared to boost the prosecution's case when he said he had a sense that something bad could happen that night because of all the guns in the area. The prosecutor also elicited testimony from McGinniss and Balch that affirmed Rosenbaum was not armed that night and did not actually hurt anyone.

In his testimony, McGinniss said that as Rosenbaum lunged, Rittenhouse "kind of dodged around" with his weapon and then leveled the gun and fired.

Binger repeatedly tried to get McGinniss to say Rosenbaum was not "lunging" but "falling" when he was shot, as McGinniss said in a media interview days after the shooting.

But McGinniss said: "He was lunging, falling. I would use those as synonymous terms in this situation

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because basically, you know, he threw his momentum towards the weapon.”

As prosecutors played footage of Rosenbaum lying fatally wounded in a car lot, McGinniss struggled to keep his composure on the stand, rapidly inhaling and exhaling, then averting his eyes from a video monitor. The prosecutor apologized for playing it, saying he had to do it.

Across the room, Rittenhouse appeared to look away from his desktop monitor and cast his eyes downward as the video showed Rosenbaum bleeding from the head, groaning loudly.

The defense also has said that a shot fired by someone in the crowd moments before Rittenhouse began shooting made the young man believe he was under attack.

Kenosha Detective Martin Howard testified that video shows that a protester, Joshua Ziminski, had fired the first shot into the air. Howard said he used a stopwatch and timed five or six videos to determine that 2.5 seconds later, Rittenhouse began firing at Rosenbaum.

A wealth of video has been played in court that captured the tumultuous demonstration and the series of shootings.

The shooting of Rosenbaum set in motion the bloodshed that followed moments later. Rittenhouse shot and killed Anthony Huber, 26, a protester from Silver Lake, Wisconsin, who was seen on bystander video hitting Rittenhouse with a skateboard.

Rittenhouse then wounded Gaige Grosskreutz, 27, a protester from West Allis, Wisconsin, who had a gun in his hand as he stepped toward Rittenhouse.

Before testimony resumed Thursday, the judge dismissed a juror who had made a joke to a court security officer about the police shooting of Jacob Blake, the Black man whose wounding triggered the Kenosha protests. The juror, a retired man, declined to repeat the joke for the judge.

“It is clear that the appearance of bias is present and it would seriously undermine the outcome of the case,” Circuit Judge Bruce Schroeder said.

Prosecutors also replayed widely seen video of the interview that The Daily Caller did with Rittenhouse before the shooting.

It began with Rittenhouse, a former police youth cadet, in front of a boarded-up building, where he said he and other men were there “to protect this business, and part of my job is there’s somebody hurt, I’m running into harm’s way.” He also said he was there to provide medical aid.

Rittenhouse could get life in prison if convicted in the politically and racially polarizing case that has stirred furious debate over self-defense, vigilantism, the right to bear arms and the racial unrest that erupted around the U.S. after the killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis and other cases like it.

Forliti reported from Minneapolis; Webber reported from Fenton, Michigan. Associated Press writer Dave Kolpack contributed from Fargo, North Dakota.

Find AP’s full coverage on the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse at: <https://apnews.com/hub/kyle-rittenhouse>

US mandates vaccines or tests for big companies by Jan. 4

By DAVID KOENIG Associated Press

Tens of millions of Americans who work at companies with 100 or more employees will need to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19 by Jan. 4 or get tested for the virus weekly under government rules issued Thursday.

The new requirements are the Biden administration’s boldest move yet to persuade reluctant Americans to finally get a vaccine that has been widely available for months — or face financial consequences. If successful, administration officials believe it will go a long way toward ending a pandemic that has killed more than 750,000 Americans.

First previewed by President Joe Biden in September, the requirements will apply to about 84 million workers at medium and large businesses, although it is not clear how many of those employees are unvaccinated.

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The Occupational Safety and Health Administration regulations will force the companies to require that unvaccinated workers test negative for COVID-19 at least once a week and wear a mask while in the workplace.

OSHA left open the possibility of expanding the requirement to smaller businesses. It asked for public comment on whether employers with fewer than 100 employees could handle vaccination or testing programs.

Tougher rules will apply to another 17 million people working in nursing homes, hospitals and other facilities that receive money from Medicare and Medicaid. Those workers will not have an option for testing — they will need to be vaccinated.

Workers will be able to ask for exemptions on medical or religious grounds.

The requirements will not apply to people who work at home or outdoors.

Biden framed the issue as a simple choice between getting more people vaccinated or prolonging the pandemic.

"While I would have much preferred that requirements not become necessary, too many people remain unvaccinated for us to get out of this pandemic for good," he said Thursday in a statement.

Biden said his encouragement for businesses to impose mandates and his own previous requirements for the military and federal contractors have helped reduce the number of unvaccinated Americans over 12 from 100 million in late July to about 60 million now.

Those measures, he said, have not led to mass firings or worker shortages, adding that vaccines have been required before to fight other diseases.

OSHA said companies that fail to comply with the regulations could face penalties of nearly \$14,000 per violation.

The agency will face enforcement challenges. Even counting help from states, OSHA has only 1,850 inspectors to oversee 130 million workers at 8 million workplaces. An administration official said the agency will respond to whistleblower complaints and make limited spot checks.

The release of the rules followed weeks of regulatory review and meetings with business groups, labor unions and others.

OSHA drafted the rules under emergency authority meant to protect workers from an imminent health hazard. The agency estimated that the vaccine mandate will save more than 6,500 worker lives and prevent more than 250,000 hospitalizations over the next six months.

The rules set up potential legal battles along partisan lines between states and the federal government. Several states and Republican governors threatened to sue, contending that the administration lacks the power to make such sweeping mandates under emergency authority.

OSHA's parent agency, the Labor Department, says it is on sound legal footing. The department's top legal official, Seema Nanda, said OSHA rules preempt conflicting state laws or orders, including those that bar employers from requiring vaccinations, testing or face masks.

Senate Republicans immediately launched a petition to force a vote to overturn the vaccine mandate, but with Democrats controlling the chamber, the effort is nearly certain to fail.

The rules will require workers to receive either two doses of the Pfizer or Moderna vaccines or one dose of the Johnson & Johnson vaccine by Jan. 4 or be tested weekly. Employees testing positive must be removed from the workplace.

Companies won't be required to provide or pay for tests for unvaccinated workers, but they must give paid time off for employees to get the shots and sick leave to recover from side effects that prevent them from working. Requirements for masks and paid time off for shots take effect Dec. 5.

Employers covered by the requirements must verify their workers' vaccination status by checking documents such as CDC vaccination cards, records from doctors or pharmacies, or even an employee's own signed declaration.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services issued a separate rule requiring vaccination for workers in 76,000 health facilities and home health care providers that get funding from the government health programs. A senior administration official said several large private health care organizations imposed their

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own mandates and achieved high vaccination rates — 96% or higher — without widespread resignations.

A previously announced requirement for federal contractors to make sure workers are vaccinated was scheduled to take effect Dec. 8, but the administration delayed that measure until Jan. 4 to match the requirements on other large employers and health care providers. Already, more than a dozen states have sued to block the mandate on contractors.

For weeks, Biden has encouraged businesses not to wait for OSHA to act. He has touted businesses that announced their own vaccine requirements and urged others to follow their lead.

Administration officials say those efforts are paying off, with about 70% of adults fully vaccinated.

Workplace vaccine mandates have become more common recently, with hospitals, state and local governments and some major corporations requiring COVID-19 shots for employees. The mandates have led to overwhelming compliance — in some cases 99% of workers — although a small but vocal number have faced dismissal, filed lawsuits or sought exemptions.

United Airlines required 67,000 U.S. employees to get vaccinated or face termination. Only a couple hundred refused to do so, although about 2,000 are seeking exemptions.

In August, Tyson Foods told its 120,000 U.S. workers that they must be vaccinated by Nov. 1. On Thursday, the company said more than 96% of its workforce was vaccinated, including 60,500 people who got their shots after the August announcement.

Walmart, the nation's largest private employer, said in late July it was requiring all workers at its headquarters in Bentonville, Arkansas, and managers who travel within the United States to be vaccinated by Oct. 4. The retailer stopped short of requiring shots for front-line workers, however.

However, some companies have expressed fear that some vaccine-hesitant workers might quit, leaving their workforces even thinner in an already-tight labor market.

Several corporate groups, including the Business Roundtable, endorsed the mandate. However, retail groups worried that the requirement could disrupt their operations during the critical Christmas shopping period. Retailers and others also said it could worsen supply chain disruptions.

The National Retail Federation suggested the new rules are not needed because the rolling average number of new daily cases in the U.S. has fallen by more than half since September.

"Nevertheless, the Biden administration has chosen to declare an 'emergency' and impose burdensome new requirements on retailers during the crucial holiday shopping season," said David French, a senior vice president for the trade group.

The number of new infections in the U.S. is still falling from a summer surge caused by the highly contagious delta variant, but the rate of decline has slowed in recent weeks. The 7-day moving average is down 6% from two weeks ago, at more than 76,000 new cases and 1,200 deaths per day.

Cole Stevenson, a 34-year-old autoworker at the Ford Rouge truck plant in Dearborn, Michigan, said he remains uncomfortable with a vaccine that was developed just a year ago.

He intends to get weekly COVID-19 tests and says he won't reconsider getting the vaccine even if the tests are a financial or logistical burden.

"It's getting pretty disgusting how much the government thinks they can be involved in people's lives," he said. "If the whole thing is sort of cooling down and cases are lowering, then buzz off — don't force it on people."

Associated Press writers Paul Wiseman and Hope Yen in Washington, Tom Krisher and Dee-Ann Durbin in Detroit, Stacey Plaisance-Jenkins in Picayune, Mississippi, and Matt O'Brien in Providence, Rhode Island, contributed.

Biden administration sues Texas over new voting restrictions

By PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The Biden administration on Thursday sued Texas over new election laws that outlasted a summer of dramatic protests by Democrats, who remain unable in Congress to pass legisla-

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tion they say is needed to counteract a year of Republicans adding restrictive voting measures nationwide.

The lawsuit does not go after the entirety of a sweeping bill signed in September by Republican Gov. Greg Abbott in Texas, which already has some of the nation's toughest voting rules. Instead, the challenge filed in a San Antonio federal court targets provisions surrounding mail-in voting requirements and voter assistance, which the Justice Department argues violate federal civil rights protections.

It now puts two of the Texas GOP's biggest conservative victories this year in court against the federal government, as the Justice Department is simultaneously trying to stop a new Texas law that has banned most abortions since September.

"Our democracy depends on the right of eligible voters to cast a ballot and to have that ballot counted," Attorney General Merrick Garland said. "The Justice Department will continue to use all the authorities at its disposal to protect this fundamental pillar of our society."

Georgia's new voting laws also drew a lawsuit this summer from the Biden administration, which is under pressure from the Democratic base to take greater action on voting rights, a top priority for the party ahead of the 2022 midterm elections. But time is running out and Senate Republicans have repeatedly blocked federal legislation to change election laws, including another attempt Wednesday.

Opponents of the Texas law known as Senate Bill 1 had already sued the state, accusing Republicans of setting out to disenfranchise minorities and other Democratic-leaning voters. The bill specifically targets Democratic strongholds, and was followed by Abbott weeks later signing new voting maps that fortify the GOP's slipping dominance amid the state's explosive growth.

Abbott and other Texas Republicans say the changes provide safeguards against voter fraud, which is rare.

"Biden is coming after Texas for SB1, our recently enacted election integrity law," Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton tweeted. "It's a great and a much-needed bill. Ensuring Texas has safe, secure, and transparent elections is a top priority of mine. I will see you in court, Biden!"

Under the new Texas law, people assisting voters who need help completing their ballot must take a longer oath that now includes acknowledging a penalty of perjury. It also removes old language about answering voters' questions, which opponents say will harm voters with disabilities.

Mail-in ballots must also now include a driver's license number or the last four digits of a Social Security number, which the Justice Department says raises the chances of ballots being wrongly rejected and excluding some eligible voters.

The law also bans 24-hour polling locations and drive-thru voting, which are not contested in the Justice Department's lawsuit.

The legislation in Texas set off a summer of walkouts by Democrats, for which Republicans threatened them with arrest, and Abbott vetoed the paychecks of thousands of rank-and-file staffers when the bill failed to reach him sooner. At one point, more than 50 Democratic lawmakers decamped to Washington, bringing the Texas Capitol to a grinding halt for 38 days.

Texas Democrats had hoped the gambit would pressure Congress into passing new voting rights protections at the federal level, but those efforts have repeatedly stalled. GOP senators oppose the Democratic voting bills as a "power grab."

Texas is among at least 18 states that have enacted new voting restrictions since the 2020 election, according to the Brennan Center for Justice. The laws are part of a national GOP campaign, including in Florida, Georgia and Arizona, to tighten voting laws in the name of security, partly driven by former President Donald Trump's false claims that the election was stolen.

Trump has called on Abbott to audit the election results in Texas, even though he won the state. Last month, Abbott appointed a new state elections chief, attorney John Scott, who briefly joined Trump's legal team last year as it challenged the 2020 results.

Abbott tweeted "bring it" in response to the lawsuit, saying the new rules are legal. Democrats, meanwhile, welcomed the challenge.

"Texas leaders must be held accountable for their blatant abuse of power in a shameless attempt to keep themselves in power," said Gilberto Hinojosa, chairman of the Texas Democratic Party.

EXPLAINER: Murphy wins after mail ballots extend lead

By STEPHEN OHLEMACHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy was declared the winner in his reelection campaign Wednesday after results from mail ballots and Democratic-leaning counties helped the Democrat extend his lead over Republican Jack Ciattarelli.

The Associated Press declared Murphy the winner Wednesday evening after a new batch of votes from Republican-leaning Monmouth County increased Murphy's lead and closed the door to a Ciattarelli comeback.

Ciattarelli won Monmouth by nearly 20 percentage points. However, in keeping with a statewide trend, Murphy carried the mail vote in Monmouth by about 40 percentage points.

Democrats across the country have dominated mail-in voting since the 2020 presidential election, after former President Donald Trump claimed, without evidence, that they were susceptible to fraud. Since then, Republicans have been much less likely to vote by mail, even in states where they traditionally won the mail vote.

The mail ballots made up a little more than 20% of all votes in New Jersey. Those votes broke in Murphy's favor, even in counties he did not win, such as Monmouth, Gloucester and Cumberland.

At the time of AP's call, there was still a significant number of ballots to be counted in Democrat-leaning counties, including Essex and Mercer. That's why Murphy's lead continued to grow after AP declared him the winner.

As of Thursday evening, Murphy's lead stood at 44,000 votes out of nearly 2.5 million votes counted. His margin over Ciattarelli was 1.8 percentage points.

Ciattarelli took the lead in the vote count Tuesday night as Republican-leaning counties reported their votes faster than the more Democratic counties, and with many counties yet to report results from their mail ballots. The race flipped for Murphy Wednesday morning after more votes came in from Burlington, Bergen, Hudson and Camden.

Ohlemacher is the AP's Election Decision Editor

Rittenhouse juror dismissal shows risk of bias in big cases

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

The juror dismissed from Kyle Rittenhouse's murder trial apparently was trying to be funny when he cracked to a court security officer about a police officer's shooting of Jacob Blake, the event that set off the protests where Rittenhouse shot three people, two fatally.

Blake, who is Black, was shot by a white officer three months after the murder of George Floyd by a white officer in Minneapolis prompted protests over racial injustice nationwide. When Judge Bruce Schroeder said Thursday that the joke — which the juror didn't want to repeat in open court — showed bias that "would seriously undermine the outcome" of the Rittenhouse trial, the man objected.

"It wasn't anything to do with the case," the juror told Schroeder Thursday. "It wasn't anything to do with Kyle."

The moment captured the bias — sometimes explicit, but often implicit or unconscious — that experts say is especially damaging in criminal proceedings. Jurors who may not see their biases as problematic or even realize they exist are asked to weigh witness testimony and ultimately decide a defendant's fate. And while the juror in Kenosha, Wisconsin, may have vocalized his beliefs, sharing the joke while being escorted to his car after jury duty, in most cases these biases are difficult or impossible to detect.

"It's one of the most significant problems facing the criminal justice system in both state and federal courts," said Mark Bennett, a retired federal and state judge who directs the Institute for Justice Reform & Innovation at Drake University Law School in Iowa.

In some places, courts and judges have taken steps to educate jurors, attorneys and others about implicit bias. Questions to potential jurors go well beyond asking if they can be impartial, instead asking about stereotypes they may hold or their interactions with others.

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In part of Washington state, potential jurors are shown a video about implicit bias, and attorneys are encouraged to ask questions during jury selection such as what they thought about the video. It's not clear whether that happened in Kenosha, Wisconsin, where 20 people were seated for the Rittenhouse jury in one day. The 12 who decide the case will be announced later, the judge said.

Bennett, who wrote a jury instruction on implicit bias and has studied bias in judges, said Schroeder did the right thing in dismissing the juror. Any person who would joke about Blake while at the courthouse during jury duty doesn't have "the kind of mindset a judge would want" on the case, he said.

But Bennett also said a one-day jury selection isn't enough time to root out people with explicit or implicit biases, particularly in racially polarizing cases. In one major federal trial, Bennett took 14 days to select a jury. He also has had potential jurors fill out a questionnaire — one as long as 99 questions — at home, where they're more likely to answer candidly, before coming to the jury selection.

"You cannot do it in one day," he said. "I'm sorry, you just cannot."

Margaret Russell, a professor at Santa Clara University School of Law and co-founder of the Equal Justice Society, agreed, saying the jury selection "seems astonishingly quick" for a case that involves some of the most "contentious, inflammatory issues of our day."

Rittenhouse is white, as are the three men he shot in August 2020. But the case has raised questions about racial justice, policing, firearms and white privilege that have polarized people far outside Kenosha.

Blake, who was shot by the officer two days before Rittenhouse shot the three men, was partially paralyzed in the shooting. Police say it occurred while they responded to a domestic disturbance call and that Blake was holding a knife. The county prosecutor later declined to charge the officer.

Protests following the Blake shooting at times turned violent and destructive, with rioters setting fires and ransacking businesses. Rittenhouse, then 17, traveled to Kenosha from his home in Illinois, just across the Wisconsin state line. The former police youth cadet said he went to Kenosha to protect property. As he walked the streets he carried an AR-style rifle.

Prosecutors have portrayed Rittenhouse as the instigator of the three shootings, while his lawyer says Rittenhouse acted in self-defense. He could be sentenced to life in prison if convicted.

After his arrest, conservatives called Rittenhouse an American patriot, with people contributing millions of dollars to a legal defense fund and helping the now 18-year-old post a \$2 million bail to leave jail.

Russell said she also believed Schroeder was correct to dismiss the juror Thursday, saying his actions show "a shockingly ignorant sense of the case and the issues involved." The fact that the man didn't want to repeat his joke in open court suggests he knew it was inappropriate, she said.

Russell also was troubled by the juror's use of Rittenhouse's first name as he referred to the defendant. Calling him "Kyle," she said, showed a sense of familiarity that "perhaps means he's not viewing the case through an unbiased lens."

Find AP's full coverage on the trial of Kyle Rittenhouse: <https://apnews.com/hub/kyle-rittenhouse>

Ethiopia compares Tigray forces to 'rat' as war marks 1 year

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ethiopia's government marked a year of war by lashing out Thursday in response to international alarm about hate speech, comparing the rival Tigray forces to "a rat that strays far from its hole" and saying the country is close to "burying the evil forces."

The statement from the government communication service, posted on social media and confirmed by a government spokesman, came amid urgent new efforts to calm the escalating war as a U.S. special envoy arrived and the president of neighboring Kenya and others called for an immediate cease-fire.

State Department spokesman Ned Price told reporters that "we are speaking as starkly as we can" in urging U.S. citizens to leave the country.

The war that has killed thousands of people and displaced millions since November 2020 threatens to engulf Ethiopia's capital, Addis Ababa. Tigray forces seized key cities in recent days and linked up with

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another armed group, leading the government of Africa's second-most populous country to declare a national state of emergency with sweeping detention powers.

U.S. special envoy Jeffrey Feltman, who this week insisted that "there are many, many ways to initiate discreet talks" toward peace, met Thursday with Ethiopia's deputy prime minister and ministers of defense and finance, and his visit continues Friday.

Efforts to engage Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, on peace talks have failed. United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he spoke with Abiy on Wednesday "to offer my good offices to create the conditions for a dialogue so the fighting stops."

The U.N. Security Council scheduled a open meeting followed by closed consultations Friday afternoon on the escalating violence in Ethiopia at the request of Ireland, Kenya, Niger, Tunisia and St. Vincent & The Grenadines.

Council members are considering a press statement calling for an immediate cessation of the expanding and intensifying military clashes, an end to hate speech, and unrestricted access to tackle the world's worst hunger crisis in a decade in the Tigray region, according to a draft obtained by The Associated Press.

But last week a congressional aide told The Associated Press "there have been talks of talks with officials, but when it gets to the Abiy level and the senior (Tigray forces) level, the demands are wide, and Abiy doesn't want to talk."

Instead, the prime minister has urged citizens to rise up and "bury" the Tigray forces who long dominated the national government before he came to power. On Wednesday, Facebook said it had removed a post by Abiy with that language, saying it violated policies against inciting violence. It was a rare action against a head of state or government.

The government statement on Thursday took aim not only at Facebook, accusing it of showing its "true colors," but also at media, humanitarian groups and others allegedly "working hand in hand with the enemy in propagating its false narrative."

But Ethiopia's government aimed its harshest language at the Tigray forces. "TPLF and its puppets are being encircled by our forces. As the saying goes, 'a rat that strays far from its hole is nearer to death,'" the statement said, referring to the Tigray People's Liberation Front.

The U.N. special adviser on the prevention of genocide, Alice Wairimu Nderitu, told an online event Thursday that dehumanizing speech in Ethiopia is "of extreme concern," and she warned that the risk exists of the war spilling across borders and "becoming something completely unmanageable." She warned that ethnic-based militias are "so dangerous in this context."

Kenya increased security along its borders amid fears of a wave of Ethiopians fleeing as one of the world's worst humanitarian crises spreads, while its foreign ministry said statements inciting ordinary citizens into the conflict "must be shunned." Uganda's president called for a meeting of East African leaders, and the European Union warned of "fragmentation and widespread armed conflict."

Tigray forces spokesman Getachew Reda said the fighters had "joined hands" with another armed group, the Oromo Liberation Army, to seize the city of Kemisse, even closer to the capital.

"Joint operations will continue in the days and weeks ahead," he tweeted.

A security source confirmed the claim and said Tigray forces were pushing east as well as south toward the capital. The source spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to journalists.

All sides in the war have committed abuses, a joint U.N. human rights investigation said Wednesday, while millions of people in the government-blockaded Tigray region are cut off from the world. The U.N. says no humanitarian aid has entered Tigray since Ethiopian military airstrikes resumed there on Oct. 18, and 80% of essential medication is no longer available.

The Tigray forces say they are pressuring the government to end the blockade, but the spreading insecurity as they push south through the neighboring Amhara region has hampered aid delivery to hundreds of thousands of hungry people.

A university staffer who fled the Amhara town of Woldiya before Tigray forces arrived weeks ago said

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friends there were climbing nearby hillsides to call the outside world with reports of low food supplies and people drinking from rivers, while electricity is cut. There is no aid in the occupied areas, Alemayehu said, giving only his first name for his security.

"I wish the war ends before it moves to the capital, that's my prayer to God," he said, adding that he opposes the Tigray fighters.

With the government statements and the new state of emergency, ethnic Tigrayans in the capital told the AP they were hiding in their homes as authorities carried out house-to-house searches and stopped people on the streets to check identity cards, which everyone must now carry.

One lawyer, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation, estimated that thousands have been detained this week, citing conversations with "many people from the four corners of the city." He said Tigrayan lawyers like him were powerless to help because of their ethnicity.

"Our only hope now is the (Tigray forces)," said one young woman, Rahel, whose husband was detained on Tuesday while going to work as a merchant but has not been charged. "They might not save us, to be honest. I've already given up on my life, but if our families can be saved, I think that's enough."

Another Tigrayan, Yared, said his brother, a businessman, was detained on Monday, and when he went to the police station, he saw dozens of other Tigrayans.

"It's crazy, my friends in Addis, non-Tigrayans, are calling me and telling me not to leave the house," Yared said.

"They go through your phone, and if you have some material about the Tigray war that would be suggesting supporting the war, they would just detain you," he said. "The past four days have been the worst by far, the scope at which they're detaining people, it's just terrorizing. We don't feel safe in our homes anymore."

Matthew Lee in Washington and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed.

New grand jury seated as Trump criminal probe continues

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — New York prosecutors investigating former President Donald Trump's business dealings have convened a new grand jury to hear evidence in the probe as the previous panel's term was set to run out, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press Thursday.

The development comes as the Manhattan district attorney's office is weighing whether to seek more indictments in a case that has already resulted in tax fraud charges against Trump's company, the Trump Organization, and its longtime CFO Allen Weisselberg.

Trump himself remains under investigation after District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. led a multiyear fight to get access to the Republican's tax records.

The person was not authorized to speak publicly and did so on condition of anonymity. The news of the new grand jury was first reported by The Washington Post.

The Manhattan DA's office declined comment. A message seeking comment was left with a Trump Organization lawyer.

Investigators working for Vance and New York Attorney General Letitia James have spent more than two years looking at whether the Trump Organization misled banks or tax officials about the value of the company's assets, inflating them to gain favorable loan terms or minimizing them to reap tax savings.

As part of a continuing civil investigation, James' office issued subpoenas to local governments in November 2019 for records pertaining to Trump's estate north of Manhattan, Seven Springs, and a tax benefit Trump received for placing land into a conservation trust. Vance issued subpoenas about a year ago seeking many of the same records.

James' office has also been looking at similar issues relating to a Trump office building in New York City, a hotel in Chicago and a golf course near Los Angeles. Her office also won a series of court rulings forcing Trump's company and a law firm it hired to turn over troves of records.

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The New York Times reported last month that Westchester District Attorney Mimi Rocah had opened an investigation into whether the Trump Organization misled officials to cut taxes for a golf course.

In the criminal case, Weisselberg has pleaded not guilty to charges he collected more than \$1.7 million in off-the-books compensation, including apartment rent, car payments and school tuition. Trump's company was also charged in the case, which prosecutors have described as a "sweeping and audacious" tax fraud scheme.

Prosecutors have also been weighing whether to seek charges against the company's chief operating officer Matthew Calamari Sr.

According to the indictment, from 2005 through this year, the Trump Organization and Weisselberg, 74, cheated tax authorities by conspiring to pay senior executives off the books by way of lucrative fringe benefits and other means. Weisselberg alone was accused of defrauding the federal, state and city governments out of more than \$900,000 in unpaid taxes and undeserved tax refunds.

Trump himself was not charged with any wrongdoing, but prosecutors noted he signed some of the checks at the center of the case.

In recent months, a pair of Trump Organization executives testified before the grand jury hearing evidence in the Manhattan case. Under New York law, grand jury witnesses are granted immunity and cannot be charged for conduct they testify about.

One of the Trump executives granted immunity to testify before the grand jury is the company's director of security, Matthew Calamari Jr., the son of Matthew Calamari Sr. The other, senior vice president and controller, Jeffrey McConney, was first subpoenaed to testify in the spring and appeared before the panel again in September.

At a September hearing, Weisselberg lawyer Bryan Scarlatos told a judge he had "strong reason to believe" more indictments were coming in the case.

The grand jury that returned the Weisselberg and Trump Organization indictments was empaneled in the spring for a six-month term. The new grand jury will also meet for six months, overlapping the start of Alvin Bragg's tenure as district attorney.

Bragg, a Democrat, won Tuesday's election and will take over in January for Vance, who is retiring.

As a top deputy to New York's attorney general in 2018, Bragg helped oversee a lawsuit that led to the closure of Trump's charitable foundation over allegations that he used the nonprofit to further his political and business interests.

In an interview prior to his election, Bragg told The Associated Press his prior experience handling mortgage fraud, money laundering and other white-collar investigations made him feel "very equipped to follow the facts wherever they go" in the Trump criminal probe.

"I remember the moment sitting around the table with the attorney general deciding to file the case and the ultimate question was, 'is this a matter that we would file if it were someone else,'" Bragg said.

"And we arrived with the answer that yes, this was the kind of conduct that was worthy of an attorney general action. It's that same philosophy and approach that I'll take to the D.A.'s office," he said.

Follow Michael Sisak on Twitter at twitter.com/mikesisak

Michigan city on edge as lead water crisis persists

By MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

BENTON HARBOR, Mich. (AP) — Shortly after sunrise on a recent Saturday in Benton Harbor, Michigan, residents began lining up for free bottled water so they could drink and cook without fear of the high levels of lead in the city's tap water.

Free water distribution sites are a fixture of life in the majority Black city in the southwestern corner of Michigan, where almost half of the nearly 10,000 residents live below the poverty line. For three years, tests of its public water system revealed elevated levels of lead.

Waiting for free bottled water is time consuming and some residents wonder why, in a state that recently

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dealt with the Flint water crisis, the problem wasn't fixed sooner.

"It's tiresome," said Rhonda Nelson, waiting in line at a site run by the Boys & Girls Clubs of Benton Harbor.

"I understand what Flint was going through, I really do," she said.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer has promised to spend millions of dollars to replace the city's lead service lines within 18 months – a blistering pace for a process that often takes decades. For now, residents have been warned not to cook, drink or make baby formula with tap water.

Residents worry what the elevated lead levels mean for their families' health. The problem is also inconvenient and stressful. Drivers line up at water distribution sites early, pulling people away from jobs and family. Bottled water must be used carefully so it doesn't run out. Even waiting in line has consequences – idling uses gas that drivers have to pay to replenish more often.

Waiting in line, LaKeena Crawford worried about the consequences for her 8-year-old daughter, who she has seen try to turn on the water.

"I'm like, 'No!'" Crawford said, adding that she wants her daughter to understand that lead in water is dangerous. But, "I don't want to frighten her too much."

Lead exposure can slow cognitive development, especially in young children, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and federal officials say no amount of lead in drinking water is considered safe for their consumption. In recent months, activists have pushed for more immediate, aggressive action, and the state has ramped up its response.

Some wonder whether the problem would have been handled more quickly if Benton Harbor's residents looked more like those in neighboring St. Joseph, who are predominantly white.

"Sometimes you just have to call out racism, and that's what it feels like," said Ambie Bell, helping distribute water to residents.

There are millions of aging underground lead lines connecting buildings to water mains across the country, mostly in the Midwest but also scattered across other states like New Jersey and Massachusetts. The old pipes can become an urgent public health risk. Newark, New Jersey, saw prolonged lead water problems that led to the rapid replacement of thousands of lead pipes. High test results in Clarksburg, West Virginia, raised alarm bells earlier this year. The word Flint is now synonymous with lead water problems.

Digging up and replacing lead service lines is costly, stressing tight local budgets. The infrastructure and reconciliation bills pending in Congress include billions to address lead line replacement that activists say could make a significant difference.

The lead water problem in Flint started when that city switched its water source to the Flint River as a temporary cost-saving move without proper treatment, corroding its lead pipes. But Benton Harbor's water source, Lake Michigan, is considered safe and many other places get their water there, City Manager Ellis Mitchell said.

"Our problem is clearly our own infrastructure," he said.

On Tuesday, the Environmental Protection Agency identified a range of violations at Benton Harbor's water facility. The federal inspection found problems so bad that the city needs to consider forfeiting ownership, the EPA said.

"The people of Benton Harbor have suffered for too long," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said in a statement.

Water systems occasionally produce high test results, but in Benton Harbor, authorities haven't been able to bring them down. The long-term fix involves replacing the roughly 2,400 pipes that may contain lead, state officials said.

The city also lacks resources. Prior governors installed emergency managers with broad decision-making authority that reduced staffing, and the city's population has declined, shrinking its tax base.

"This results in a knock-on effect of reduced technical, managerial and financial capability at the water plant due to underinvestment in staff, equipment and training," said Scott Dean, a spokesman with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy.

After Flint's water crisis, Michigan tightened requirements for lead in drinking water in 2018, boasting it had passed the nation's most protective law. It imposed more stringent requirements for testing water for

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lead and mandated that old lead service lines be replaced.

Environmental groups and local activists filed a petition over Benton Harbor in September with the EPA, urging aggressive action. The Rev. Edward Pinkney, an activist whose name is on the petition, said if they hadn't filed, an aggressive official response may have taken even longer.

"We couldn't take it anymore," Pinkney said.

The Michigan House of Representatives oversight committee held a hearing last month on Benton Harbor. Republican Committee Chair Steven Johnson questioned why the recent state response to the city's lead crisis feels like it has gone "from zero to 100 miles per hour" even though the problem has persisted for years.

Michigan officials say they have taken the problem seriously, and on Thursday, Gov. Whitmer issued a directive calling for a review of current drinking water rules, including examining ways to reduce lead levels and ensure communities fully inform the public when there are problems.

Earlier efforts have included offering Benton Harbor residents filters to reduce the amount of lead in drinking water, though their effectiveness is being reviewed, and corrosion control to cut the amount of lead from pipes. While lead sampling results overall are still too high, the proportion of high readings has decreased, officials said.

Inspectors, however, have knocked the city for failing to notify water customers in their water bills about the problem over a recent year-long period.

Dr. Mona Hanna-Attisha is a pediatrician and professor at Michigan State University who raised early alarms about Flint. She gets questions from parents about whether some developmental problem could be linked to lead in the water. It's extremely difficult, however, to draw a direct link between an individual's health problem and lead in the water.

"That's why lead poisoning has evaded diagnosis, treatment and prevention for so long," she said, adding that exposure to lead isn't safe for children and it's too soon to predict what the long-term impact may be. Lead levels can vary by household and individuals can respond differently to exposure. The impact can depend on other factors like poverty, too, making it especially important to address the issue in city's like Benton Harbor, she said.

Marc A. Edwards, a Virginia Tech professor focused on water treatment, said the attention on Benton Harbor highlights a national problem of cities struggling with elevated lead levels. He said lead water crises like Flint degrade public trust in official management of water systems.

Sylvester Bownes, who wears a prosthetic on his right leg, said he has consumed bottled water for years because he doesn't trust Benton Harbor's water.

Pushing a makeshift cart filled with several cases of bottled water a half-mile to his home, he said a water main rupture had temporarily shut off the public water supply, so with no running water, he not only needed bottled water for drinking, but water for basic needs like filling his toilets.

"Water is everything," Bownes said. "It's like gold."

Residents who are homebound can call a help line to get water delivered, but Bownes said the process takes too long and isn't reliable. State officials said hundreds of people have been added to a list for weekly deliveries. If there are problems, residents should report them, they said.

Mitchell, the city manager, said last month that customers are being billed for water that authorities say can still be used for tasks like laundry and washing dishes. He said the city is looking into whether "there's some sort of relief we can get on that" for residents.

At the Boys & Girls Club water giveaway volunteers handed out nearly 2,200 cases by noon.

Nelson, who has 12- and 14-year-old daughters and a 5-year-old son, said preparing dinner can take 15 to 20 water bottles. "Hopefully they get it fixed soon," she said.

Greg Johnson, who was the first to pull up at about 8:15 a.m., said he arrived early so his family's supplies would be replenished for his daughters, ages 8 and 11.

"It takes two cases in the morning to get them ready for school," he said. "They've got to get washed up and all that. It's kinda hectic."

The Associated Press receives support from the Walton Family Foundation for coverage of water and environmental policy. The AP is solely responsible for all content. For all of AP's environmental coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/environment>

Arbery death trial dominated by race before it even begins

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

BRUNSWICK, Ga. (AP) — The trial hasn't even started and yet issues of race are dominating the case in which three white men are charged with murder for chasing and killing Ahmaud Arbery.

The 25-year-old Black man's slaying has become part of the broader reckoning on racial injustice in the U.S. legal system. Greg and Travis McMichael, a father and son, and their neighbor William "Roddie" Bryan weren't charged for more than two months until a cellphone video of the shooting leaked online.

And Arbery's family and their supporters had their faith rattled after 2 1/2 weeks of jury selection ended Wednesday with the judge agreeing to seat a panel of 11 whites and one Black man.

"It's probably clearer than before that race is going to be at the forefront of this case and will probably even play a big role in jury deliberations" at the end of the trial, said Page Pate, a Georgia criminal defense attorney who isn't involved in the case.

Superior Court Judge Timothy Walmsley plans to have the jury sworn in Friday to hear opening statements from lawyers on both sides. He intends to seat 15 total panelists: a main jury of 12 plus three alternates.

The total number shrank by one Thursday when the judge dismissed a juror from the main panel, a white woman, citing medical reasons. The race of the alternate juror who replaced her was not known. The judge has not given the races of the alternate jurors, and they weren't asked their race in court during jury selection.

The judge had said that he agreed with prosecutors that the exclusion of other Black potential jurors appeared to be "intentional discrimination." He also said Georgia law limited his authority to intervene after defense attorneys stated nonracial reasons for cutting those jurors.

The judge said the group of 48 used to narrow down the final jury had included 12 potential jurors who were Black. Prosecutors were allowed to strike a dozen people from the jury pool and defense lawyers got to cut 24, for virtually any reason save for one exception. The U.S. Supreme Court has held it's unconstitutional to exclude potential jurors based solely on race or ethnicity.

"It's outrageous that Black jurors were intentionally excluded to create such an imbalanced jury," Ben Crump, an attorney for Arbery's father, Marcus Arbery Sr., said in a statement Thursday.

Black potential jurors seemed to face greater scrutiny than whites as they were questioned by lawyers during jury selection, and the resulting jury likely favors the defense, said Pate, who practices in Atlanta and Brunswick.

"I'm not saying it's intentionally discriminatory, or if it was just the dynamic of this case, but it was a lot harder to get on this jury if you were Black than if you were white," Pate said.

Many expressed strong opinions about Arbery's killing and their beliefs that race played a role. Some knew Arbery or other members of his family. Defense attorneys cited those reasons for striking Black people from the jury pool.

The McMichaels armed themselves and pursued Arbery after spotting him running in their neighborhood. Bryan joined the chase and took cellphone video of Travis McMichael shooting Arbery three times with a shotgun.

Defense attorneys say the men committed no crimes. They say Arbery had been recorded by security cameras inside a nearby house under construction and they suspected him of stealing. Greg McMichael told police his son opened fire in self-defense after Arbery attacked with his fists and grappled for Travis McMichael's shotgun.

Most of the jurors among the final 16 had previously told attorneys that they had seen the video, and many had read news stories about the case. All said they could keep an open mind during the trial.

"I don't think the video is the whole story," said one juror, a woman who works in retail and said she

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didn't know enough to form an opinion about the case.

Another juror, a retired government employee, described a conversation about the shooting with her husband as being "probably something that was like, 'That's too bad that happened.'"

Other jurors expressed stronger reactions to Arbery's death. One young woman called the cellphone video of the shooting "obscene," saying: "there's no reason someone should ever have to see someone else die."

An Air Force veteran who made the final jury panel said it was his impression that Greg McMichael was "stalking" Arbery. Another juror, a woman who works with volunteers, told lawyers she was somewhat "fearful" of the defendants, adding: "They're driving around with a gun!"

A railroad worker on the jury said he could fairly consider whether Travis McMichael shot Arbery in self-defense, though he also noted Arbery was unarmed.

"He didn't have no gun or nothing and he was by himself," the juror said of Arbery. "It was three persons who attacked one and no gun."

Optimism from climate talks: Warming projections down a bit

By SETH BORENSTEIN undefined

GLASGOW, Scotland (AP) — With pledges for a United Nations climate conference, the world may be ever so slightly receding from gloomy scenarios of future global warming, according to two new preliminary scientific analyses Thursday.

The two reports — one by the International Energy Agency and the other by Australian scientists — focused on optimistic scenarios. If all goes right, they said, recent actions will trim two-or three-tenths of a degree Celsius (0.3 to 0.5 degrees Fahrenheit) from projections made in mid-October.

Instead of 2.1 degrees Celsius (3.8 Fahrenheit) of warming since pre-industrial times, the analyses project warming at 1.8 (3.2 degrees Fahrenheit) or 1.9 degrees (3.4 degrees Fahrenheit).

Still, both projections leave the world far from the 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) of warming since pre-industrial time that is the goal of the 2015 Paris climate deal. The planet has already warmed 1.1 degrees Celsius (2 degrees Fahrenheit).

The U.N. planned an announcement for Friday afternoon at climate negotiations about how much "actions announced so far at Glasgow helped to bend the curve."

"We are now in a slightly more positive outlook for the future," said University of Melbourne climate scientist Malte Meinshausen, whose flash analysis, not peer-reviewed, sees warming at 1.9 degrees, mostly because of late long-term pledges by India and China.

"It's still a long way away from 1.5 degrees. We know that some of the ecosystems are going to suffer and we're going to notice, for example, the coral reefs and the Great Barrier Reef here in Australia (die) with these temperature levels," Meinshausen said in an interview. "It is just scraping below two degrees. So therefore there's a lot more to be done."

The energy agency analysis factored in India's announcement of short-term carbon dioxide emission curbs and a net-zero pledge by 2070 on Monday, as well as pledges by more than 100 countries Tuesday to reduce the powerful greenhouse gas methane. The intergovernmental agency said it was the first time projections fell below 2 degrees Celsius — a long-standing threshold for tipping points that some scientists say could bring even more dangerous and potentially uncontrolled warming.

"If all these pledges were to be implemented, the temperature increase could be limited to 1.8 degrees Celsius. I think this is a very, well-celebrated achievement," agency chief Fatih Birol told leaders at climate negotiations in Glasgow called COP26. "Congratulations."

Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research Director Johan Rockstrom, who wasn't part of either research, said small differences at this temperature level are important: "Every tenth of a degree matters because it gets worse and worse."

Both teams emphasize that their projections are based on the most optimistic scenarios possible, using nations' mid-century — or in India's case 2070 — pledges of net zero emissions that are far from codified in plans or actions.

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Scenarios that look at just short-term pledges, not net-zero ones, put warming at 2.7 degrees Celsius (4.9 degrees Fahrenheit). So some outsider experts say the new projections should be viewed with caution.

"This optimistic view must be complemented with the short-term view, which is pointing in the opposite direction," said New Climate Institute scientist Niklas Hohne, who tracks emission pledges for Climate Action Tracker, which will have its own estimates in a few days.

Mohamed Adow, director of Nairobi-based think tank Power Shift Africa and a veteran climate talks observer, said it's too early to put too much faith in Glasgow pledges: "These announcements may generate headlines but assessing their true worth is hugely difficult, especially at speed during a COP meeting."

Associated Press reporter Frank Jordans contributed from Glasgow.

For more AP climate coverage: <https://apnews.com/hub/climate>.

Follow Seth Borenstein on Twitter: @ borenbears.

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Spending \$2,300, GOP newcomer Ed Durr beats top NJ lawmaker

By MIKE CATALINI undefined

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — New Jersey's longtime state Senate president, Democrat Steve Sweeney lost reelection, falling to a Republican newcomer who spent little money and underscoring Democratic woes in the Biden era.

Edward Durr, a furniture company truck driver and first-time officeholder, defeated Sweeney in New Jersey's 3rd Legislative District, according to results tallied Thursday.

Sweeney's defeat was unexpected, and has cast the fate of state government into uncertainty.

"It is stunning and shocking and I cannot figure it out," said Senate Majority Leader Loretta Weinberg said in an interview.

His loss unfolded in a politically competitive suburban Philadelphia district whose counties split their votes between Democrats and Republicans in the presidential elections in 2016 and again in 2020.

It also coincided with boosted GOP turnout even in an off-year election that saw Republicans make gains across the state. Durr's victory Thursday netted about 3% more votes than Sweeney did in 2017 in unofficial returns.

Sweeney's attention was also focused on tight Senate races elsewhere in the state.

"I don't really think it was Steve Sweeney," said incoming Republican Senate Leader Steve Oroho. "I think it had to do with the message coming from people who were just annoyed at all the executive orders and all the mandates and being sick and tired of being told what they can and can't do."

The loss says more about the headwinds Democrats are facing after losing the governor's race in Virginia and winning a narrow victory in New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy's race against Republican Jack Ciattarelli, experts said.

"This was a protest vote against the Biden administration and Murphy," said Montclair State University political science professor Brigid Harrison. "Steve was in many ways just how people voiced their dissatisfaction and anger with the larger political structure."

Sweeney said in a statement Thursday he was waiting for more votes to come in before acknowledging the loss.

"While I am currently trailing in the race, we want to make sure every vote is counted. Our voters deserve that, and we will wait for the final results," he said.

Sweeney has served as Senate president since 2010 and was responsible for shepherding Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy's progressive agenda through the Legislature, including a phased-in \$15 an hour minimum

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wage, paid sick leave and recreational marijuana legalization.

He is also known for his high-profile reversal on opposition to gay marriage. Sweeney said in 2011 that he made the "biggest mistake of my legislative career" when he voted against marriage equality.

Though Sweeney was a fellow Democrat, he fought Murphy at the start of his administration over raising income taxes on the wealthy and worked closely with Republican Chris Christie during his eight-year term in office ending in 2018.

A deal he worked out with Christie to overhaul public worker pension put Sweeney at odds with public sector unions, who would go on to become key supporters of Murphy.

Sweeney's loss was cheered by progressive Democrats from southern New Jersey, who saw him as a product of transactional, machine politics.

"Today is glorious," said Sue Altman, director of New Jersey Working Families, in a tweet. Altman is a longtime critic of Sweeney's and saw him as focused on trying to maintain control of the Democratic party, particularly in southern New Jersey.

His allies say he was open-minded and eventually delivered for the left.

"I think he was a remarkable senator and Senate president, and as I have often reminded my progressive friends that we never could have gotten all those bills on Gov. Murphy's desk for him to sign without the cooperation of the Senate president," Weinberg said.

Sweeney had faced electoral opposition before. In 2017, his feud with the state's biggest teacher's union over retirement benefits among other issues led to a battle in which the New Jersey Education Association spent millions to try to defeat Sweeney. The union's effort failed.

But this year, Durr defeated him, spending \$2,300, according to an Election Law Enforcement Commission document filed online on Thursday. Earlier reports had shown he had spent just \$153.31 on his campaign.

Messages seeking comment have been left with Durr.

Durr describes himself as a 2nd Amendment rights advocate and fiscally conservative, who wants to lower taxes. In an interview with NJ.com, he described how unlikely he viewed his victory to be. He has previously run unsuccessfully for state Assembly in 2017 and 2019, but this is his first elected position.

"I joked with people and I said, 'I'm going to shock the world, I'm going to beat this man,'" Durr said Wednesday afternoon. "I was saying it, but really kind of joking. Because what chance did a person like me really stand against this man? He's literally the second-most powerful person in the state of New Jersey."

Sweeney is an ironworker by trade who has served as an executive with the International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers. He is also a key ally and friend of Democratic power broker, George Norcross, who's widely considered to be one of the most powerful unelected people in the state.

It's unclear who will become the next Senate president. If Democrats maintain control of the chamber, as incomplete results show they could do, then Democratic senators will meet to choose their next leader.

The 3rd Legislative District covers parts of Cumberland, Gloucester and Salem counties.

Coming into Election Day, Democrats had controlled the state Assembly with 52 seats to Republicans' 28. In the state Senate, Democrats had 25 seats to the Republicans' 15.

This article has been corrected to show that Durr is not a first-time candidate. He ran unsuccessfully for state Assembly in 2017 and 2019.

Portugal's president calls a snap election on Jan. 30

By BARRY HATTON Associated Press

LISBON, Portugal (AP) — Portugal's president announced Thursday that he is dissolving parliament and calling a snap election for Jan. 30, following the minority Socialist government's defeat in a key vote on post-pandemic plans to spend billions of euros in European Union funding.

The announcement, in a televised address to the nation, was widely expected. President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa had previously said Portugal would go to the ballot box two years ahead of schedule if the government's 2022 state budget proposal was rejected by parliament, which happened last week.

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The ballot will elect 230 lawmakers to parliament, where political parties then decide who forms a government.

The election comes at a sensitive time for the country of 10.3 million people, as it is poised to begin deploying some 45 billion euros (\$52 billion) in help from the EU to help fire up the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rebello de Sousa said the Portuguese needed to decide what they want from the next few years, "which are decisive" due to the windfall of funds.

"This is the decisive moment for a long-lasting recovery from the greatest pandemic of the past 100 years and the social and economic crisis it caused," he said.

The 2022 spending plan is "an especially important budget at an especially important time," he said.

Recent opinion polls suggest the center-left Socialist Party will win re-election but will again fall short of a parliamentary majority.

Given the procedural requirements, a new state budget proposal may not come before parliament until April. That could put the brakes on an economic rebound.

As things stand, the COVID-19 pandemic shouldn't disrupt an election, though health authorities have warned about a potential winter resurgence in Europe.

A popular mass vaccination campaign has helped Portugal, for the moment, largely contain COVID-19. The country has on average been reporting fewer than 1,000 new cases a day since mid-September, with daily deaths in single figures.

The 2022 state budget forecast GDP growth of 4.8% this year and 5.5% next year, with a jobless rate of around 6.5%, roughly the same as now.

That has helped lift the Socialist Party's popularity, with polls predicting it will be returned to power with a comfortable win, capturing around 39% of the vote. But that would still leave the Socialists needing parliamentary support for legislation and put Portugal back where it started before the political crisis of recent weeks.

The traditional center-right opposition parties are in disarray. Both the main opposition Social Democratic Party and the smaller Popular Party are engaged in divisive leadership challenges.

The hard-left Communist Party and Left Bloc, who allied with the government up to last week, have seen their popularity dwindle to single figures in recent elections.

In the last election, in 2019, 10 parties won seats in the 230-seat parliament in a trend toward political fragmentation that compels parties to negotiate with each other.

Most striking is the rise of Portugal's first right-wing populist party, Chega! (Enough!), which was founded just three years ago. It currently has just one lawmaker, but polls indicate it could capture as many as 20 seats in an election, potentially serving as a kingmaker.

Rioter who bragged she wouldn't go to jail gets prison term

By JACQUES BILLEAUD and LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

A real estate agent from suburban Dallas who flaunted her participation in the Jan. 6 riot at the U.S. Capitol on social media and later bragged she wasn't going to jail because she is white, has blond hair and a good job was sentenced on Thursday to two months behind bars.

While some rioters sentenced for the same misdemeanor conviction have received only probation or home confinement, prosecutors sought incarceration for Jennifer Leigh Ryan of Frisco, Texas, saying she has shown a lack of candor and remorse for her actions when the pro-Trump mob attacked the Capitol building and delayed Congress' certification of Joe Biden's Electoral College victory.

They also said Ryan's belief that she's shielded from punishment shows she doesn't grasp the seriousness of her crime.

Ryan wasn't facing a felony for more serious conduct, but U.S. District Judge Christopher Cooper said she was still among the mob who overpowered police in an attack that led to the deaths of five people and will have a lasting effect on government institutions.

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Though Ryan said she was sorry for her actions, Cooper questioned whether she is remorseful and has respect for the law.

"Your actions since Jan. 6 make me doubt some of those things," the judge said.

Prosecutors said Ryan traveled to Washington on a jet chartered by a Facebook friend, described Trump's rally before the riot as a prelude to war, livestreamed her entry into the building as alarms sounded, participated in chants of "Fight For Trump," tweeted a photo of herself next to broken windows outside the Capitol and later said she deserved a medal for what she did.

Her lawyer responded that she was in the building for only two minutes, didn't act violently and has a First Amendment right to speak up on social media.

The judge then referred to Ryan's March 26 tweet in which she wrote, "Definitely not going to jail. Sorry I have blonde hair white skin a great job a great future and I'm not going to jail. Sorry to rain on your hater parade. I did nothing wrong."

In a letter to the judge, Ryan denied believing she was immune to punishment, saying she was responding to people who made fun of her appearance and called for her to be imprisoned. She said her attorney told her at the time that prosecutors would be recommending a sentence of probation.

"I was attacked and I was answering them," Ryan said in court.

She is the 10th person charged in the Jan. 6 attack to get a jail or prison sentence. More than 650 people have been charged for their actions at the Capitol.

Prosecutors said Ryan has since downplayed the violence at the Capitol and falsely claimed to probation authorities that she didn't know there was a riot until she came to the Capitol, even though she had recorded herself in a hotel room watching news coverage of rioters climbing the walls of the Capitol.

After the riot, Ryan said she faced a backlash that included death threats, public heckling and graffiti painted on her real estate signs. She said she had to change her name and disguise herself in public.

Ryan tweeted a photo of herself next to broken windows and holding her fingers in a V sign, with a caption saying, "Window at The capital. And if the news doesn't stop lying about us we're going to come after their studios next..."

Shortly afterward, Ryan posted another tweet about a crowd damaging equipment belonging to news organizations, including The Associated Press. She tweeted it was a "cool moment" when rioters "went to town on the AP equipment."

Ryan is expected to start serving her sentence in January.

Also on Thursday, an Air Force veteran was sentenced to three years of probation for breaching the Capitol and taking photos and videos while inside the rotunda for about 10 minutes.

Jonathan Ace Sanders, 61, of Vincennes, Indiana, served 20 years in the military and was awarded a Purple Heart, but said he failed his training on Jan. 6.

"I wasn't tricked, I wasn't pushed, that was my failure ... I am sincerely sorry," he said.

Sanders is among dozens of veterans and active-service members charged in connection with the insurrection. As they have in other cases, prosecutors argued that should mean a tougher sentence for Sanders because his training should have told him to leave as other rioters attacked Capitol police officers and vandalized the building.

U.S. District Judge Carl Nichols declined to impose the two months of home confinement that prosecutors recommended. The judge said Sanders' military career was commendable service to his country, but also should have kept him away.

"In my view, his service cuts both ways," Nichols said. "It should have been obvious to him this was a violent riot."

Earlier on Thursday, a Maryland woman who joined the mob's attack also was sentenced to three years of probation, including two months of home detention.

Brittiany Angelina Dillon said her actions at the Capitol were "inexcusable and unacceptable." Judge Dabney Friedrich said text messages show Dillon clearly anticipated violence when she went to Washington on Jan. 6 and seemed intent on doing her part to stop Congress from certifying Biden's victory.

According to prosecutors, Dillon pushed through a crowd of rioters to approach an entrance to the Capitol

but was pushed back before she could make it beyond the building's threshold.

The judge said she was troubled by statements that Dillon made before and after the riot, including her reference to law enforcement officers as "devils."

"The attack she participated in was an attack on our institutions of government, the rule of law and our democratic process," Friedrich said. _____ Billeaud reported from Phoenix and Whitehurst from Salt Lake City. Associated Press reporter Michael Kunzelman contributed from College Park, Maryland.

Many women have left the workforce. When will they return?

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — There was a time when Naomi Peña could seemingly do it all: Work a full-time job and raise four children on her own.

But when the viral pandemic struck early last year, her personal challenges began to mount and she faced an aching decision: Her children or her job?

She chose her children. In August, Peña left her well-paying position as an executive assistant at Google in New York City. In doing so, she joined millions of other women who are sitting out the job market recovery while caring for relatives, searching for affordable child care, reassessing their careers or shifting their work-life priorities.

"I had to pivot," said Peña, 41, who said the pandemic disrupted her children's lives and led her to suspend her career because she felt she was needed more at home than at work.

"I walked away from a salary job with amazing benefits, so ultimately I could be present with my kids," she said.

A single mother of four ranging from middle school-age to college-age, Peña knows she'll eventually have to look for another full-time job — or join the gig economy — to regain a steady income. Just not yet.

The pandemic has both laid bare the disproportionate burdens many women shoulder in caring for children or aging parents and highlighted the vital roles they have long played in America's labor force. The United States bled tens of millions of jobs when states began shuttering huge swaths of the economy after COVID-19 erupted. But as the economy has swiftly rebounded and employers have posted record-high job openings, many women have delayed a return to the workplace, willingly or otherwise.

Even with children back in school, the influx of women into the job market that most analysts had expected has yet to materialize. The number of women either working or looking for work actually fell in September from August. For men, the number rose.

For parents of young children, the male-female disparities are stark. Among mothers of children 13 or younger, the proportion who were employed in September was nearly 4% below pre-pandemic levels, according to Nick Bunker, director of economic research at the Indeed job listings website. For fathers with young children, the decline was just 1%.

"A lot of women have left the labor force — the question is, how permanent will it be?" said Janet Currie, a professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton University and co-director of the Program on Families and Children at the National Bureau of Economic Research. "And if they're going to come back, when will we see them come back? I don't know the answers to any of that."

Many economists and officials, including Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, had speculated that the re-opening of schools would free more mothers to take jobs. So far that hasn't happened. The delta variant caused temporary school closings in many areas, which might have discouraged some mothers from returning to work in September. The number of mothers who were employed actually declined for a second straight month.

Still, economists are holding out hope that with increasing vaccinations leading to fewer viral cases, Friday's U.S. jobs report for October will show an increase in the number of employed women. Any gain, though, is likely to be small, and it could take months to at least partially reverse the pandemic's impact on female employment.

A major reason, Currie noted, is the worsening difficulty of finding reliable and affordable child care.

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That crisis, Currie suggested, is “probably making some people’s minds up for them, because if you can’t get childcare and you have young children, somebody has to look after them.”

Besides childcare, experts point to other factors that have kept some women out of the workforce. The number of people who aren’t working because they’re caring for sick relatives remains elevated. And surveys by the job listings website Indeed have found that many of the unemployed aren’t searching very hard for jobs because their spouses are still working.

As the pandemic erupted in the spring of 2020, roughly 3.5 million mothers with school-age children either lost jobs, took leaves of absence or left the labor market altogether, according to an analysis by the Census Bureau.

A new report, “Women in the Workplace,” by the consulting firm McKinsey & Co. illustrates how the pandemic imposed an especially heavy toll on working women. It found that one in three women over the past year had thought about leaving their jobs or “downshifting” their careers. Early in the pandemic, by contrast, the study’s authors said, just one in four women had considered leaving.

“Women are even more burned out now than they were a year ago,” the report said, “and the gap in burnout between women and men has nearly doubled”: Forty-two percent of women said they felt burnt out this year, compared with 32% who said so in 2020. By contrast, a smaller proportion of men — 35% — felt burnt out this year, compared with 28% in 2020.

Months before the pandemic, Keryn Francisco, a 51-year-old former designer for The North Face, had to decide whether to move, along with her company, to Denver.

She ultimately decided not to leave. And as COVID-19 raged, she became more comfortable with her decision, even if it meant being unemployed and shrinking her severance payout. She had been collecting unemployment aid and has picked up some freelancing to avoid dipping too deeply into savings.

A solo parent, Francisco wanted to focus on caring for her son, now 10, and her elderly parents in the San Francisco Bay area.

“It was out of a sense of responsibility and obligation,” she said. “But also, honestly, I didn’t know what was happening with COVID. So there was a lot of fear and kind of insecurity about like, if my parents died.”

During her time away from work, Francisco made a discovery that hadn’t quite seemed clear to her before: “I was burned out.” Now, she’s considering the conditions for a full-time return to the workforce.

“Once you leave the corporate treadmill,” she said, “you can actually catch your breath. Something does change inside of you.”

Many other women can’t afford to be so choosy, even if they’d like to. Tens of millions of working women, many of them people of color, labor in low-wage jobs and struggle to afford rent, food, utilities and other necessities.

“There may be labor shortages, but lots of folks are working right now and do so because there is really no choice,” said Debra Lancaster, executive director for the Center for Women and Work at Rutgers University. “They need to work to put food on their table.”

Ashley Thomas, who is in her early 40s, said her sabbatical from her job as a public policy advocate is just temporary but a much-needed respite to more deeply consider her career options.

“I had this opportunity to take a step back and just take a breather — because I have been working hard my entire adult life,” Thomas said. “This is not a permanent break. It’s a temporary break.”

There was no single trigger, Thomas said, for her decision to leave her job as a public policy advocate based in Jacksonville, Florida. The virus played a role, although even she is uncertain how much a factor it was.

“I have family members who are elderly and maybe not in the best of health that I was very worried about,” she said. “We have two teenagers here who were home from school, and this is a really hard time for them to just sort of be out of school and not be interacting with their friends as much.”

She recognizes that many other women can’t afford to take such a break from work. Thomas’ husband remains employed, and her two teenage step-children no longer need so much close attention.

“Women have been known to sort of take the brunt of the emotional labor involved in running a household

— and working on top of that,” she said. “It’s probably inevitable that folks have some sort of reckoning to reconsider the trajectory of what their life is going to look like, especially after a pandemic.”

Rugaber contributed from Washington.

American Girl Dolls, Risk, sand make it to Toy Hall of Fame

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (AP) — American Girl dolls and the strategy board game Risk were inducted into the National Toy Hall of Fame on Thursday in recognition of their influence on the toy industry. Sand, which the group called perhaps the most universal and oldest toy in the world, was also inducted.

All three were honored during a ceremony at the hall after winning over a panel of experts who voted for them from a group of 12 finalists.

Also in the running this year were four other competitive games: Battleship, The Settlers of Catan, Mah-jong and billiards, as well as Cabbage Patch Kids, Masters of the Universe, Fisher-Price Corn Popper, the toy fire engine and the piñata.

Anyone can nominate a toy but to be considered, they must have withstood tests of time and memory, changed play or toy design and fostered learning, creativity or discovery.

American Girl dolls, the 1986 creation of educator Pleasant Rowland, were recognized for their exploration of the country’s social and cultural history. The 18-inch historical dolls and accompanying books each offer insights into an era. For example, Molly McIntire is waiting for her father to return home from World War II.

The Truly Me contemporary doll line, with its diversity of skin tones, hair and gender, followed in 1995, letting children choose a doll that looks like them.

Rowland, 80, called the American Girl doll’s inclusion “an incredible honor.”

“I’m so proud of the American Girl family—past and present—who have been faithful stewards of this brand for more than three decades, helping to capture the hearts of an entire generation of girls,” she said in an emailed statement.

“Rowland’s formula for combining doll play with history lessons worked, in her words, like ‘chocolate cake with vitamins,’” curator Michelle Parnett-Dwyer said. “In an era when some education experts claimed that school curriculums paid little attention to history, this toy may well have filled a void.”

Risk, based on the French game Le Conquete du Monde, was first published in the United States in 1959 and continues to influence other board games, hall officials said. It challenges players to control armies and conquer the world on a game board that is a map of continents.

“Risk became one of the most popular board games of all time, inspiring a new corps of passionate gamers, and influencing other games which began the wargaming hobby — and by extension the Euro-games like The Settlers of Catan that many enjoy today,” curator Nicolas Ricketts said.

Sand was honored for its “opportunities for tactical, physical, cooperative, creative, and independent free play,” according to the hall of fame, which is housed inside The Strong Museum of Play in Rochester, New York.

“Children recognize sand as a creative material suitable for pouring, scooping, sieving, raking, and measuring,” it said. “Wet sand is even better, ready for kids to construct, shape, and sculpt.”

“Although some playthings can only be found online or in certain stores, sand has a global reach that most toy manufacturers would envy,” chief curator Christopher Bensch said. “It’s been a vehicle for play since prehistory, and anyone who has spent the day at the beach can understand the allure of this toy.”

The class of 2021 joins 74 previous honorees.

Countries pledge to cut heavily polluting coal, with caveats

By FRANK JORDANS and SETH BORENSTEIN Associated Press

GLASGOW, Scotland (AP) — In the fight to curb climate change, several major coal-using nations announced steps Thursday to wean themselves — at times slowly — off of the heavily polluting fossil fuel.

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The pledges to phase out coal come on top of other promises made at the U.N. climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, that the head of an international energy organization said trimmed several tenths of a degree from projections of future warming. But outside experts called that "optimistic."

Optimism also abounded in relation to the promises on coal, which has the dirtiest carbon footprint of the major fuels and is a significant source of planet-warming emissions.

"Today, I think we can say that the end of coal is in sight," said Alok Sharma, who is chairing the conference of nearly 200 nations, known as COP26.

Critics say that vision is still obscured by a lot of smoke because several major economies still have yet to set a date for ending their dependence on the fuel, including the United States, China, India and Japan — which was targeted outside the summit venue Thursday by protesters clad as animated characters.

What nations have promised varies. Some have pledged to quit coal completely at a future date, while others say they'll stop building new plants, and even more, including China, are talking about just stopping the financing of new coal plants abroad.

The British government said pledges of new or earlier deadlines for ending coal use came from more than 20 countries including Ukraine, Vietnam, South Korea, Indonesia and Chile.

Some came with notable caveats, such as Indonesia's request for additional aid before committing to bring its deadline forward to the 2040s.

Meanwhile, Poland, the second-biggest user of coal in Europe after Germany, appeared to backtrack on any ambitious new commitments within hours of the announcement.

"Energy security and the assurances of jobs is a priority for us," Anna Moskwa, Poland's minister for climate and environment, said in a tweet, citing the government's existing plan which "provides for a departure from hard coal by 2049." Earlier in the day, it had seemed that Poland might bring that deadline forward by at least a decade.

Campaigners reacted angrily to the apparent U-turn.

"Moskwa has underscored that her government cannot be trusted to sign a postcard, let alone a responsible climate pledge," said Kathrin Gutmann, campaign director of the group Europe Beyond Coal.

Separately, more than two dozen countries, cities and companies joined the Powering Past Coal Alliance, whose members commit to ending coal use by 2030, for developed countries, and no later than 2050 for developing ones. Banks that are members pledge not to provide loans for the worst types of coal-fired power plants.

Meanwhile, the United States, Canada, Denmark and several other nations signed a different pledge to "prioritize" funding clean energy over fossil fuel projects abroad.

While not completely ruling out financial support for coal-fired power plants, the countries said they would refrain from any "new direct public support" for coal except in limited circumstances.

That move was seen as a significant step by environmental campaigners, who said that it could push international lenders to stop providing loans for new fossil fuel projects.

A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss officials' thinking, said that while the U.S. hadn't opted to join the coal phase-out pledges, its commitment to a clean energy future was clear. The Biden administration wants to reach 100% carbon pollution-free electricity by 2035.

Underlining the urgent need for action on coal, a new analysis by scientists at Global Carbon Project found emissions from the fuel increased dramatically in 2021, not just from pandemic-struck 2020 levels, but even when compared to pre-pandemic 2019 levels. The world spewed 14.7 billion metric tons (16.2 billion tons) of carbon dioxide from coal burning, 5.7% more than last year, said the group, which tracks annual carbon pollution.

That was mostly spurred by a dramatic increase in China, which hit a new peak of coal emissions this year of 7.6 billion metric tons (8.4 billion tons) of carbon dioxide, more than half the globe's coal emissions, the report said.

Still, experts said the announcement and others made so far at the summit showed the growing momentum to ditch coal.

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"Today's commitments will help to shift whole continents on their journey to phase out coal," said Dave Jones of the energy think tank Ember.

Ukraine, the third-biggest coal consumer in Europe, is bringing forward its coal deadline, from 2050 to 2035.

Coal production in Ukraine has already dropped significantly over the past few years: From 40.9 million metric tons in 2016 to 28.8 million in 2020 (45 million tons to 32 million), according to the Energy Ministry.

The figures do not include production in the coal fields of separatist-controlled eastern Ukraine, which accounted for about half of Ukraine's mines prior to the 2014 uprising.

"The progress on coal being shown at COP26 demonstrates that the conditions are ripe for a global coal exit," said Leo Roberts, a senior researcher at the environmental think tank E3G.

"We now need to see the incoming massive scale-up in clean energy finance made available quickly to ensure all countries can confidently move from coal to clean," he added.

But some environmental activists said the commitments didn't go far enough.

"Emissions from oil and gas already far outstrip coal and are booming, while coal is already entering a terminal decline," said Murray Worthy of the campaign group Global Witness. "This is a small step forwards when what was needed was a giant leap."

The agreements on coal are not part of the formal negotiations at the U.N. talks in Glasgow. But British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, whose country is hosting the conference, had said he wanted to see deals on coal, cars, trees and cash.

Fatih Birol, head of the International Energy Agency, said Thursday that a new analysis by the Paris-based body shows that fully achieving all the emissions-reduction pledges made on previous days — including for the potent greenhouse gas methane — could allow the world to limit warming to 1.8 degrees Celsius (3.2 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

The goal that countries set at a previous conference in Paris is to limit temperature increases to 1.5C (2.7F). A United Nations analysis showed that before Glasgow the world was heading to a 2.7C (4.9F) increase while other analyses showed warming in the mid- to upper-2-degree range also.

Niklas Hohne, of the New Climate Institute and Climate Action Tracker, called Birol's figure "optimistic" and noted it was based on countries achieving pledges to only emit what can be absorbed — so called net-zero plans — when they haven't yet implemented any actions that would get them there.

Associated Press writers Sylvia Hui in London and Ellen Knickmeyer in Glasgow, Scotland, contributed.

Follow AP's coverage of the climate conference at <http://apnews.com/hub/climate>.

Radicalization's path: In case studies, finding similarities

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH, KATHY GANNON and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

In the months before he was charged with storming the Capitol, Doug Jensen was sharing conspiracy theories he'd consumed online. But it hadn't always been that way, says his brother, who recalls how he once posted the sort of family and vacation photos familiar to nearly all social media users.

A world away, Wahab hadn't always spent his days immersed in jihadist teaching. The product of a wealthy Pakistani family and the youngest son of four, he was into cars and video games, had his own motorcycle, even studied in Japan.

No two ideologues are identical. No two groups are comprised of monolithic clones. No single light switch marks the shift to radicalism. The gulf between different kinds of extremists — in religious and political convictions, in desired world orders, in how deeply they embrace violence in the name of their cause — is as wide as it is obvious.

But to dwell only on the differences obscures the similarities, not only in how people absorb extremist ideology but also in how they feed off grievances and mobilize to action.

For any American who casts violent extremism as a foreign problem, the Jan. 6 Capitol siege held up

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an uncomfortable mirror that showed the same conditions for fantastical thinking and politically motivated violence as any society.

The Associated Press set out to examine the paths and mechanics of radicalization through case studies on two continents: a 20-year-old man rescued from a Taliban training camp on Afghanistan's border, and an Iowa man whose brother watched him fall sway to nonsensical conspiracy theories and ultimately play a visible role in the mob of Donald Trump loyalists that stormed the Capitol.

Two places, two men, two very different stories as seen by two close relatives. But strip away the ideologies for a moment, says John Horgan, a researcher of violent extremism. Instead, look at the psychological processes, the pathways, the roots, the experiences.

"All of those things," Horgan says, "tend to look far more similar than they are different."

THE AMERICAN

America met Doug Jensen via a video that ricocheted across the Internet, turning an officer into a hero and laying bare the mob mentality inside the Capitol that day.

Jensen is the man in a dark stocking cap, a black "Trust the Plan" shirt over a hooded sweatshirt, front and center in a crowd of rioters chasing Eugene Goodman, a Capitol Police officer, up two flights of stairs. One prominent picture shows him standing feet from an officer, arms spread wide, mouth agape.

When it was all over, he'd tell the FBI that he was a "true believer" in QAnon, that he'd gone to Washington because Q and Trump had summoned "all patriots" and that he'd expected to see Vice President Mike Pence arrested. He'd say he pushed his way to the front of the crowd because he wanted "Q" to get the credit for what was about to happen.

He'd tell his brother the photos were staged, how the police had practically let him in through the front door (prosecutors say he climbed a wall and entered through a broken window) and that some officers even did selfies with the crowd.

William Routh of Clarksville, Arkansas, had an unsettled feeling about that day even before the riot and says he cautioned his younger brother. "I said, if you go down there and you're going to do a peaceful thing, then that's fine. But I said keep your head down and don't be doing something stupid."

In interviews with the AP days and months after his younger brother's arrest, Routh painted Jensen — a 42-year-old Des Moines father of three who'd worked as a union mason laborer — as a man who enjoyed a pleasant if unextraordinary American existence. He says he took his family to places like the Grand Canyon and Yellowstone National Park, attended his children's sporting events, worked to pay for a son's college education, made anodyne Facebook posts.

"I have friends that I speak to constantly that have conspiracy theories," Routh said, "but this was a shock to me more than anything, because I would not have thought this from my brother Doug, because he's a very good, hardworking family man and he has good values."

Exactly who Jensen is, and how much knowledge he had of the world around him, depends on who's talking.

A Justice Department memo that argued for Jensen's detention cites a criminal history and his eagerness to drive more than 1,000 miles to "hear President Trump declare martial law," then to take it into his own hands when no proclamation happened. It notes that when the FBI questioned him, he said he'd gone to Washington because "Q," the movement's amorphous voice, had forecast that the "storm" had arrived.

His lawyer, Christopher Davis, countered in his own filing by essentially offering Jensen up as a dupe, a "victim of numerous conspiracy theories" and a committed family man whose initial devotion to QAnon "was its stated mission to eliminate pedophiles from society."

Six months after the insurrection, the argument resonated with a judge who agreed to release Jensen on house arrest as his case moved forward. The judge, Timothy Kelly, cited a video in which Jensen referred to the Capitol building as the White House and said he didn't believe Jensen could have planned an attack in advance "when he had no basic understanding of where he even was that day."

Yet less than two months after he was released, Jensen was ordered back to jail for violating the conditions of his freedom. Though barred from accessing a cellphone, he watched a symposium sponsored

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by MyPillow CEO Mike Lindell that offered up false theories that the presidential election's outcome was changed by Chinese hackers. A federal officer making the first unannounced visit to Jensen found him in his garage using an iPhone to watch news from Rumble, a streaming platform popular with conservatives.

Davis, who weeks earlier had asserted that his client "feels deceived, recognizing that he bought into a pack of lies," likened his client's behavior this time to an addiction. The judge was unmoved.

"It's now clear that he has not experienced a transformation and that he continues to seek out those conspiracy theories that led to his dangerous conduct on Jan. 6," Kelly said. "I don't see any reason to believe that he has had the wake-up call that he needs."

Precisely when and how Jensen came to absorb the conspiracies that led him to the Capitol is bewildering to Routh, who says he took Jensen under his wing during a challenging childhood that included stays in foster care and now feels compelled, as his oldest living relative, to speak on his behalf.

When Jensen was questioned by the FBI, according to an agent's testimony, he said for the last couple of years he'd return home from an eight-hour workday and consume information from QAnon. In the four months before the riot, the brothers communicated about QAnon as Jensen shared videos and other conspiracy-laden messages that he purported to find meaning in but that Routh found suspect.

It was a period rife with baseless theories, advanced on the Internet and mainstream television, that an election conducted legitimately was somehow stolen in favor of Democrat Joe Biden. "It was just out there. It is on the internet everywhere," Routh says.

Routh, who says he's a Republican who supported Trump, maintains his brother and others like him were frightened by the prospect of a Biden victory. Before Jan. 6, Routh says, "We have been being told for the last — what? — seven, eight months that if the Democrats get control, we're losing our country, OK? That scares a lot of people."

He says he understands the anxiety of Trump supporters who fear the country may get more radical on the left. He has friends in oil fields and the pipeline industry who don't know "if they're going to be able to feed their families again." As Routh criss-crossed the country as a truck driver, he says the idea Trump would lose re-election seemed unfathomable given that virtually everyone he met, everywhere he went, was pushing "Trump, Trump, Trump."

When Routh looks at the photos of Jensen and the group he was with Jan. 6, he doesn't see a determination to physically hurt anyone or vandalize the building. And despite the QAnon T-shirt, and despite the statement to the FBI that he was "all about a revolution," Routh insists his brother was more a follower than a leader. Jensen is not among those charged with conspiracy or with being part of a militia group, and though prosecutors say he had a pocket knife with him, his lawyer says it was from work and he never took it out.

"He had a lot of influence from everybody else there," Routh said this summer as he awaited a judge's ruling on his brother's bond motion. "And he has always been the kind of kid that says, 'I can do that.'"

Two days after the riot, back home in Iowa, Jensen walked 6 miles (9.66 kilometers) to the Des Moines police department after seeing he was featured in videos of the chaos, an FBI agent would later testify. There, the FBI says, he made statements now at the center of the case, including admitting chasing Goodman up the stairs, that he yelled "Hit me. I'll take it" as the officer raised a baton to move him back and that he profanely bellowed for the arrests of government leaders.

Though prosecutors suggest he had the presence of mind to delete potentially incriminating social media accounts from his phone, he also seemed uncertain — confused, even — during his encounter with law enforcement. As officials questioned him, according to an FBI agent's testimony, he said words to the effect of, "Am I being duped?"

THE PAKISTANI

Wahab had it all. The youngest son of four from a wealthy Pakistani family, he spent his early years in the United Arab Emirates and for a time in Japan, studying. Wahab liked cars, had his own motorcycle and was crazy about video games.

His uncle, who rescued the 20-year-old from a Taliban training camp on Pakistan's border with Afghani-

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stan earlier this year, asked that his full name not be used because in the northwest where the family lives, militants have deep-reaching tentacles. But more than that, he worries about his family's reputation because of its prominence. He agreed to be quoted using his middle name, Kamal.

The family has business interests scattered across the globe. Kamal is one of five brothers who runs the family-owned import/export conglomerate. Each brother in turn has groomed and primed their sons for the business. Wahab's older brothers are already running overseas branches of the family business.

Wahab's future was to be no different. He returned to Pakistan in his early teens from abroad. Being the youngest son in a society that prizes males, he was spoiled. His older brothers sent him "pocket money," his uncle said. Other than school, Wahab had few responsibilities.

His uncle blamed his slide to radicalization on the neighborhood teens Wahab hung out with in their northwest Pakistan hometown — not to mention video games and Internet sites.

Wahab's friends introduced him to dozens of sites, his uncle said. They told of Muslims being attacked, women raped, babies brutally killed. The gruesomeness was horrifying, though Kamal says there was no way to know what was true — or if any had been doctored. But for Wahab, the images were deeply disturbing.

"He felt like he hadn't known what was going on, that he had spent his life in darkness and he felt he should be involved. His friends insisted he should. They told him he was rich and should help our people," his uncle said.

To his uncle, Wahab seemed to become increasingly aggressive and fixated on violence with the seemingly endless hours he spent playing video games. One in particular, called PUBG, was all the rage with Wahab and his friends.

"All the boys loved it," Kamal said. "For hours they would play as a team against the computer."

On pubgmobile.com, the game is described as focusing "on visual quality, maps, shooting experience ... providing an all-rounded surreal Battle Royale experience to players. A hundred players will land on the battleground to begin an intense yet fun journey." Wahab's uncle said he'd be shouting instructions as he played, interacting with teammates.

Suddenly, earlier this year, Wahab disappeared. His parents, frantic, searched everywhere. Wahab wasn't the first in the family to flirt with extremism. His cousin Salman had joined the local Pakistani Taliban years before. But he was different: He'd never been interested in school and was sent to a religious school, or madrassa, for his education. The family had long given up on him.

Salman swore he hadn't seen Wahab and knew nothing of where he might be — or if he had even joined jihad.

Suspicion then fell on Wahab's friends. Family members were certain they'd induced him to defend against attacks that Wahab and his friends were convinced were being waged against Muslims, simply because of their religion.

The family used its influence and money to press the fathers of Wahab's friends to find the 20-year-old. They finally located him at a Pakistani Taliban training camp, where Kamal said Wahab was being instructed in the use of small weapons.

Such camps are also often used to identify would-be suicide bombers and instruct them in the use of explosives, identification of soft targets and how to cause the greatest destruction. The Pakistan Taliban have carried out horrific attacks; in 2014, insurgents armed with automatic rifles attacked a public school, killing more than 150 people, most children, some as young as 5.

When Wahab's father discovered his son was at a training camp, he was furious, said his uncle.

"He told the people, 'Leave him there. I don't accept him as my son anymore.' But I took it on myself to bring him back," Kamal said. He said he didn't ask Wahab about the camp or why he wanted to go — or even such basics as how he got there.

"I didn't want him talking about any of it. I didn't want to know why he went because then I knew he would start to get excited again and he would start thinking about it all over again," Kamal said. "Instead, I took a firm face with him."

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His uncle told Wahab he was getting another chance — his last.

"I told him, 'Now it is on me. I have taken the responsibility. You won't get another chance. If you do anything again then I will shoot you,'" his uncle said. In Pakistan's northwest, where tribal laws and customs often decide family disputes and feuds, the threat was most likely not an idle one.

Today, Wahab is back in the family business, but his uncle says he is closely watched. He isn't allowed to deal with the company finances and his circle of friends is monitored. "Right now we don't trust him. It will take us time," his uncle says.

Fearful that others among Wahab's siblings and cousins could be enticed to extremism, the family has imposed greater restrictions on young male relatives. Their independence has been restricted, Kamal says: "We are watching all the young boys now, and most nights they have to be home — unless they tell us where they are."

Moral outrage. A sense of injustice. A feeling that things can only be fixed through urgent, potentially violent action.

Those tend to motivate people who gravitate toward extremism, according to Horgan, who directs the Violent Extremism Research Group at Georgia State University. He says such action is often seen as necessary to ward off a perceived impending threat to one's way of life — and to secure a better future.

"Those similarities you will find repeated across the board, whether you're talking about extreme right-wing militias in Oklahoma or you're talking about a Taliban offshoot in northwest Pakistan," Horgan says.

The world views driving extremist groups may feel fantastical and outrageous to society at large. But the true believers who consume propaganda and align themselves with like-minded associates don't see it that way. To them, they possess inside knowledge that others simply don't see.

"There's a contradiction, because they are committed insiders but part of their insider status is defined by pitting themselves against an outsider whose very existence is said to threaten their own," Horgan says. "They pride themselves on being anti-authoritarian. Yet conformity is what binds them together."

Research shows that people who espouse conspiracy theories tend to do poorer on measures of critical thinking. They reduce complex world problems — the pandemic, for instance — to simplified and reassuring answers, says Ziv Cohen, a forensic psychiatrist and expert on extremist beliefs at Weill Cornell Medical College of Cornell University.

Rather than attributing a job loss to the effects of globalization, for instance, one might see it as the result of a conspiracy that someone in particular has engineered.

"It gives us answers," he says, "that are much more appealing emotionally than the real answer."

That's where the stories of Jensen and Wahab seem to intersect. Both were seeking something. Both found answers that were enticing, attractive — and distorted versions of reality.

"For reasons he does not even understand today, he became a 'true believer' and was convinced he (was) doing a noble service by becoming a digital soldier for 'Q,'" Davis, Jensen's lawyer, wrote in a June court filing. "Maybe it was mid-life crisis, the pandemic, or perhaps the message just seemed to elevate him from his ordinary life to an exalted status with an honorable goal."

But is that goal ever reached? Is comfort ever found? Oddly, and perhaps counterintuitively, research has shown that when extremists' conspiracy theories are reinforced, their anxiety levels rise rather than fall, Cohen says. He likens the comfort to a drug — one that requires increasingly more consumption to take effect. Which helps perpetuate the cycle.

Says Cohen: "People seem to not be able to get enough of a conspiracy theory, but they're never quite satisfied or really reassured."

Associated Press writer David Pitt in Des Moines contributed to this report.

Afghan girls, faraway relatives worry over dreams disrupted

By MARIAM FAM and NOREEN NASIR Associated Press

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From her home in Illinois, Asma Yawari has built a relationship with her younger cousin in Afghanistan that's made the geographic distance between the two teenagers' worlds seem, well, not quite so distant.

They never met but have bonded over phone calls and messages -- swapping family photos and language lessons, sharing hair routines and future dreams. But after the Taliban's return to power, the cousins worry that the space between their worlds may grow in new ways. Already, some shared experiences, like going to school or dressing up, are fading, replaced by the fear that the cousin, and others like her in Afghanistan, may be left behind.

"We have similar goals and aspirations," the 17-year-old Asma says. "The only difference is that I'm able to achieve those goals and aspirations."

As a wary world watches to see the Taliban's policies for women, many older girls in Afghanistan already face disrupted dreams, worried for their future, afraid of missing out on big career goals as well as little freedoms and hobbies that helped connect them to far-flung families. And perhaps none are more worried for them than the faraway women who could have been them - the sisters, the cousins, the friends.

The cousin, 13-year-old Bahara, tells Asma she's upset that boys in her age range have been called back to school, but not girls above the sixth grade. And even if she's allowed to return, she questions what dreams of hers may no longer have a place under the Taliban.

Her hope of one day becoming a fashion designer? "I'm just going to give up on that," she says. "It's very sad for me."

Asma, who has helped organize protests in Chicago in support of Afghans scrambling to leave the country after the Taliban takeover, worries over the safety of her family in Afghanistan and the future of her female cousins.

"I always think that could have been me," she says.

The status of Afghan women, at times used to help garner support for the U.S. war after the 9/11 attacks, has once again taken center stage after the recent rise of the Taliban who face international pressure to ensure women's rights.

During their previous rule between 1996 and 2001, the group severely restricted women in the public sphere, largely confining them to their homes. That track record looms large even as they promise more rights and freedoms this time.

Throughout decades, Afghanistan has been used as grounds for competing powers to play out their proxy wars, and the status of Afghan women is often at the heart of it, says Nura Sediqe, lecturer at the Princeton School of Public and International Affairs at Princeton University.

Changes over the last two decades brought opportunity for the women in Sediqe's family in Herat province "but then fatalities continued in more rural parts of Afghanistan, so I felt this guilt."

That diversity of experiences of Afghan women is often overlooked, says Mejgan Massoumi, an Afghan American historian.

Some girls and women worked to seize the opportunity of going to school and getting a job; others faced social and economic burdens holding them back, she says.

In bigger cities, like Kabul, women may have more visibility and rights than in the many rural areas of the vast country.

Girls' education has been a battlefield with uneven progress.

Even before the recent Taliban takeover, multiple barriers -- including cultural norms, familial disapproval, security fears, financial pressures, the long distance to some schools and shortages of female teachers -- have kept significantly more girls than boys out of school, especially when the girls reach adolescence, according to a 2019 UNICEF report.

Still, UNICEF Deputy Executive Director Omar Abdi told reporters that the number of children enrolled in schools increased from one million in 2001, when the Taliban were ousted from power, to almost 10 million, including 4 million girls. Despite this progress, 4.2 million children are out of school, including 2.6 million girls, he said.

"The education gains of the past two decades must be strengthened and not rolled back," said Abdi,

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who added he urged the Taliban to let all girls resume learning.

Speaking in mid October, he said girls were allowed to attend secondary school in only five of Afghanistan's provinces. Taliban's education minister, Abdi said, told him they were working on "a framework which they will announce soon" that will allow all girls to go to secondary schools.

The Taliban have sought to portray themselves as more moderate than when they imposed their harsh interpretation of Islamic law during their earlier rule, but many Afghans are skeptical.

The Taliban is "taking their personal, unique interpretation of Islamic law and fusing it with their cultural understanding of women's rights and women's access to the public sphere," says Ali A. Olomi, an assistant professor of Islamic and Middle East history at Penn State University, Abington, stressing that Islam strongly encourages education.

Masouma Tajik worries her younger sisters may not have access to the same opportunities that have allowed her to become a data analyst in Kabul.

The 22-year-old, career-minded Tajik graduated from the American University of Afghanistan, where she studied on a scholarship.

She recalls feeling scared shortly before the Taliban seized Kabul. "The first reason that I was afraid was my right to live as a woman," she says. "I put so much time and effort on my career."

After the Taliban takeover, Tajik left Afghanistan for Eastern Europe. She's been applying for scholarships or refugee programs in different countries.

Her sisters stayed behind in Herat with the rest of the family.

One of her sisters' answers became shorter when they talked: No, she doesn't go to school (their youngest sister does). The sister, who used to tell Tajik that she wanted to join the army, didn't complain but her voice betrayed her sadness, Tajik says. More recently, that sister started sharing that she has been going out, including to the park, and studying English at home.

Tajik has no idea how to help; her own life is in limbo.

"I'm just like giving hope for them," Tajik says. "I have nothing, no plan in my hands for them. She understands this."

Nazia, 30, is also missing a younger sister who is in Afghanistan. The two were separated two years ago, when Nazia moved to America and Hena remained in Kabul.

Hena is growing hopeless about what the future holds.

At times, Nazia, who didn't want her last name used to protect the identity of relatives in Afghanistan, tries to cheer her up; at others, she joins her in crying.

Since she was a child, Hena has dreamed of becoming a doctor.

"Everything has been taken away from us," she says, speaking on Zoom as Nazia translates. She helps her mom with chores at home and, sometimes, reads her textbooks, unsure whether or when she will be able to use them in a classroom again.

And Nazia feels helpless: "I can't do anything for them."

In Afghanistan, Bahara says she had been counting the days since boys beyond the sixth grade have been allowed back to school, but not the girls.

Before, time would fly by as she juggled going to her school and doing her homework with taking outside courses in English and her favorite hobby — sewing.

She scoured Instagram for fashion design inspiration; her family felt it would be inappropriate for her to post photos of herself, but she could browse. Her mother gave her a sewing machine and she made dresses for herself and her sisters.

Now, her world has shrunk. A close friend with whom she had planned a fashion design project left the country. The courses she used to take are no longer meeting. She tries to keep a low profile, wearing a loose, long black gown when she goes out and a tightly wrapped black headscarf that frames her face; she deleted from her phone cherished photos of herself wearing dresses she made.

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A sister says she doesn't want to return to school even if allowed back, worried about potential Taliban harassment, Bahara says; but not her.

"I miss my teachers, my books, my friends," she says. "I wake up every day and when I see the clock, I think that that was the time that I should be in school."

Bahara's family is among the many who are hoping to leave the country for multiple reasons.

Talking or texting with her cousin Asma provides some relief.

Bahara holds onto the good memories, like her birthday party, shortly before Kabul fell to the Taliban. She didn't have anything to wear. "In one night, I tailored a beautiful dress."

In her new dress, surrounded by childhood girlfriends, she laughed, played games and blew out the candles.

"I think that was the last day for me that I was happy," she says. "After that ... there is no day to spend without worries."

Meanwhile, Asma recently attended her school's homecoming, but hesitated before posting photos online of herself, dolled up in a sparkling baby blue dress and posing with friends. She didn't want her cousin or other family to think she was flaunting her freedom.

"If I do go hang out with my friends, I feel guilty," she says. "I just feel guilty, like, talking about it."

Associated Press writer Deepti Hajela contributed.

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Scientists find fossil of early hominid in South Africa

By SEBABATSO MOSAMO Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — The fossil remains of an early hominid child have been discovered in a cave in South Africa by a team of international and South African researchers.

The team announced the discovery of a partial skull and teeth of a Homo naledi child who died almost 250,000 years ago when it was approximately four to six years old. The remains were found in a remote part of the cave that suggests the body had been placed there on purpose, in what could be a kind of grave, said the announcement Thursday.

The placement "adds mystery as to how these many remains came to be in these remote, dark spaces of the Rising Star Cave system," said Professor Guy Berger of the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, who led the team and made the announcement Thursday.

Homo naledi is a species of archaic human found in the Rising Star Cave, Cradle of Humankind, 50 kilometers (30 miles) northwest of Johannesburg. Homo naledi dates to the Middle Pleistocene era 335,000–236,000 years ago. The initial discovery, first publicly announced in 2015, comprises 1,550 specimens, representing 737 different elements, and at least 15 different individuals.

"Homo naledi remains one of the most enigmatic ancient human relatives ever discovered," said Berger. "It is clearly a primitive species, existing at a time when previously we thought only modern humans were in Africa. Its very presence at that time and in this place complexifies our understanding of who did what first concerning the invention of complex stone tool cultures and even ritual practices."

The new discovery is described in two papers in the journal, PaleoAnthropology.

'Tiger King' Joe Exotic says he has 'aggressive cancer'

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — The man known as "Tiger King," who gained fame in a Netflix documentary following his conviction for trying to hire someone to kill an animal rights activist, says he has cancer.

"It is with a sad face that I have to tell you ... that my prostate biopsy's came back with an aggressive cancer," Joe Exotic, who is being held at a federal prison in Fort Worth, Texas, wrote on a Twitter post

Wednesday.

The blond mullet-wearing former Oklahoma zookeeper, whose real name is Joseph Maldonado-Passage, is known for his expletive-laden rants on YouTube and a failed 2018 Oklahoma gubernatorial campaign.

He was prominently featured in the popular documentary "Tiger King: Murder, Mayhem and Madness."

He was sentenced to 22 years in prison in 2020 after being convicted for violating federal wildlife laws and a failed murder-for-hire plot targeting Carole Baskin, who runs a rescue sanctuary for big cats in Florida.

A three-judge panel for the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit in Denver in July ordered Maldonado-Passage be resentenced to a shorter term, finding that the trial court wrongly treated the two convictions separately in calculating his prison term.

The panel said his advisory sentencing range should be between 17 1/2 years and just under 22 years, rather than between just under 22 years and 27 years in prison used by the trial court.

Maldonado-Passage wrote on Twitter for prayers and "the world to be my voice to be released," saying there is no evidence he committed crimes.

Natalie Wood was assaulted by Kirk Douglas, sister alleges

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For decades, it's been one of Hollywood's darkest rumors: A teen-age Natalie Wood was sexually assaulted by a top movie star more than twice her age when she met with him at a hotel in Los Angeles.

In a memoir coming out next week, Wood's younger sister identifies the long-suspected assailant: Kirk Douglas.

"I remember that Natalie looked especially beautiful when Mom and I dropped her off that night at the Chateau Marmont entrance," Lana Wood writes in "Little Sister," alleging that the incident happened in the summer of 1955, around the time Natalie Wood was filming "The Searchers." The meeting had been arranged by their mother, Maria Zakharenko, who thought that "many doors might be thrown open for her, with just a nod of his famous, handsome head on her behalf," according to Lana Wood.

"It seemed like a long time passed before Natalie got back into the car and woke me up when she slammed the door shut," she writes. "She looked awful. She was very disheveled and very upset, and she and Mom started urgently whispering to each other. I couldn't really hear them or make out what they were saying. Something bad had apparently happened to my sister, but whatever it was, I was apparently too young to be told about it."

According to Lana Wood, Natalie Wood did not discuss with her what happened until both were adults and Natalie, after describing being brought into Douglas' suite, told her sister, "And, uh ... he hurt me Lana."

"It was like an out-of-body experience. I was terrified, I was confused," Lana Wood remembers her saying. Lana, now 75 and around 8 when the alleged incident occurred, remembered her sister and their mother agreeing it would ruin Natalie's career to publicly accuse him.

"Suck it up" was Maria's advice, according to "Little Sister," much of which focuses on Natalie Wood's death in 1981, when her body was found off Catalina Island in California. Authorities initially ruled the death an accidental drowning, but that has changed after years of scrutiny and more witnesses emerging. Wood's husband at the time, Robert Wagner, has been called a person of interest and Lana Wood is among those who hold him responsible for her death.

In her book, she recalls promising her sister not to discuss her being assaulted by Douglas, but rumors were so prevalent that when he died in 2020, at age 103, Natalie Wood's name trended along with his on Twitter. Lana Wood, whose own acting credits include "The Searchers" and the TV series "Peyton Place," believes enough has changed since her conversation with Natalie that she can now tell the whole story.

"With no one still around to protect, I'm sure she'll forgive me for finally breaking that promise," she wrote.

Douglas' son, actor Michael Douglas, said in a statement issued through his publicist: "May they both rest in peace."

Kirk Douglas, in his late 30s at the time of the alleged assault, was known for such films as "Spartacus,"

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"The Bad and the Beautiful" and "Gunfight at the O.K. Corral." He also was one of the first major actors to form his own production company and a prominent liberal activist who has been widely credited with helping to break the Cold War blacklist against suspected Communists when he hired Dalton Trumbo to write "Spartacus" and listed him by name for the 1960 release. Douglas and his second wife, Anne, donated millions of dollars through the Douglas Foundation they co-founded in 1964 with a mission to "helping those who might not otherwise be able to help themselves."

Douglas received a Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1981 and the Legion of Honor from France in 1985. He was given an honorary Oscar in 1996, when the film academy praised him as "a creative and moral force."

Douglas himself acknowledged that he was a womanizer and an unfaithful husband. Speaking to The Associated Press about Douglas in December 2016, less than a year before the #MeToo movement caught on, the actress and dancer Neile Adams lightheartedly said of her friend, "You could not sit beside him without his hand crawling up your leg."

In his memoir "The Ragman's Son," published in 1988, Douglas writes briefly about Natalie Wood. He remembers driving home one night and stopping at a red light. The door of the car in front of him opened and "a pretty little girl wearing a suede jacket hopped out" and ran up to him.

"Oh, Mr. Douglas, would you please sign my jacket?" he remembers her saying. "As I obliged, the woman who was driving got out and introduced her. 'This is my daughter. She's in movies, too. Her name is Natalie Wood.' That was the first time I met Natalie. I saw her many times afterward, before she died in that cruel accident."

US trade deficit hits record of \$80.9 billion in September

By MARTIN CRUTSINGER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. trade deficit hit an all-time high of \$80.9 billion in September as American exports fell sharply while imports, even with supply chain problems at American ports, continue to climb.

The September deficit topped the previous record of \$73.2 billion set in June, the Commerce Department reported Thursday. The deficit is the gap between what the United States exports to the rest of the world and the imports it purchases from foreign nations.

In September, exports plunged 3% to \$207.6 billion while imports rose 0.6% to \$288.5 billion.

Part of the weakness reflected a 15.5% drop in petroleum exports related to the drilling rig and refinery shutdowns during Hurricane Ida in the Gulf of Mexico. Economists expect that decline to reverse in coming months with petroleum production coming back on line.

The politically sensitive goods deficit with China shot up 15% in September to \$36.5 billion. Through the first nine months of this year America's deficit with China, the largest with any country, totaled \$255.4 billion, an increase of 14.9% over the same period in 2020.

The overall trade deficit through September hit \$638.6 billion, a 33.1% increase over the same period last year. That big jump reflects the surge in U.S. demand for imports compares to last year when many parts of the economy were shut down because of the coronavirus.

In September, the deficit in goods rose to \$98.2 billion, up a sharp 10% from the August deficit. The surplus in services, which covers such things as airline travel and financial services, rose 10.5% to \$17.2 billion, still well below the levels seen before the pandemic hit. The surplus in services is expected to rise further as COVID-19 cases retreat and travel restrictions are eased.

The rising trade deficit subtracted 1.1 percentage points from growth in the July-September quarter, a period when the economy, as measured by the gross domestic product, slowed to an annual growth rate of just 2%, sharply lower than a GDP growth rate of 6.7% in the April-June period.

As COVID-19 cases retreat and the supply chain becomes untangled, the U.S. trade deficit should start to improve in coming months although the improvement may be modest, economists say.

"We look for the trade balance to remain historically elevated through year-end, but moderation in domestic demand will cool import volumes while steady vaccine diffusion and slower virus spread should

underpin stronger export growth," Kathy Bostjancic, chief U.S. financial economist at Oxford Economics, said.

UK authorizes Merck antiviral pill, 1st shown to treat COVID

By MATTHEW PERRONE and MARIA CHENG Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Britain granted conditional authorization on Thursday to the first pill shown to successfully treat COVID-19 so far. It also is the first country to OK the treatment from drugmaker Merck, although it wasn't immediately clear how quickly the pill would be available.

The pill was licensed for adults 18 and older who have tested positive for COVID-19 and have at least one risk factor for developing severe disease, such as obesity or heart disease. Patients with mild-to-moderate COVID-19 would take four pills of the drug, known molnupiravir, twice a day for five days.

An antiviral pill that reduces symptoms and speeds recovery could prove groundbreaking, easing caseloads on hospitals and helping to curb outbreaks in poorer countries with fragile health systems. It would also bolster the two-pronged approach to the pandemic: treatment, by way of medication, and prevention, primarily through vaccinations.

Molnupiravir is also pending review with regulators in the U.S., the European Union and elsewhere. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration announced last month it would convene a panel of independent experts to scrutinize the pill's safety and effectiveness in late November.

Initial supplies will be limited. Merck has said it can produce 10 million treatment courses through the end of the year, but much of that supply has already been purchased by governments worldwide.

In October, U.K. officials announced they secured 480,000 courses of molnupiravir and expected thousands of vulnerable Britons to have access to the treatment this winter via a national study.

"Today is a historic day for our country, as the U.K. is now the first country in the world to approve an antiviral that can be taken at home for COVID-19," British health secretary Sajid Javid said.

"We are working at pace across the government and with the NHS to set out plans to deploy molnupiravir to patients through a national study as soon as possible," he said in a statement, referring to the U.K.'s National Health Service. Doctors said the treatment would be particularly significant for people who don't respond well to vaccination.

Merck and partner Ridgeback Biotherapeutic have requested clearance for the drug with regulators around the world for adults with early cases of COVID-19 who are at risk for severe disease or hospitalization. That's roughly the same group targeted for treatment with infused COVID-19 antibody drugs, the standard of care in many countries for patients who don't yet require hospitalization.

Merck announced preliminary results in September showing its drug cut hospitalizations and deaths by half among patients with early COVID-19 symptoms. The results haven't yet been peer reviewed or published in a scientific journal.

The company also didn't disclose details on molnupiravir's side effects, except to say that rates of those problems were similar between people who got the drug and those who received dummy pills.

The drug targets an enzyme the coronavirus uses to reproduce itself, inserting errors into its genetic code that slow its ability to spread and take over human cells. That genetic activity has led some independent experts to question whether the drug could potentially cause mutations leading to birth defects or tumors.

Britain's Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency said molnupiravir's ability to interact with DNA and cause mutations had been studied "extensively" and that it wasn't found to pose a risk to humans.

"Studies in rats showed that (molnupiravir) may cause harmful effects to the unborn offspring, although this was at doses which were higher than those that will be given to humans, and these effects were not observed in other animals," the agency said in an email.

In company trials, both men and women were instructed to either use contraception or abstain from sex. Pregnant women were excluded from the study. Merck has stated that the drug is safe when used as directed.

Molnupiravir was initially studied as a potential flu therapy with funding from the U.S. government. Last

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year, researchers at Emory University decided to repurpose the drug as a potential COVID-19 treatment. They then licensed the drug to Ridgeback and partner Merck.

Last week, Merck agreed to allow other drugmakers to make its COVID-19 pill, in a move aimed at helping millions of people in poorer countries get access. The Medicines Patent Pool, a U.N.-backed group, said Merck will not receive royalties under the agreement for as long as the World Health Organization deems COVID-19 to be a global emergency.

But the deal was criticized by some activists for excluding many middle-income countries capable of making millions of treatments, including Brazil and China.

Still, experts commended Merck for agreeing to widely share its formula and promising to help any companies who need technological help in making their drug — something no coronavirus vaccine producers have agreed to.

“Unlike the grotesquely unequal distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, the poorest countries will not have to wait at the back of the queue for molnupiravir,” said Dr. Mohga Kamal-Yanni, a senior health adviser to the People’s Vaccine Alliance. Fewer than 1% of the world’s COVID-19 vaccines have gone to poor countries and experts hope easier-to-dispense treatments will help them curb the pandemic.

Merck previously announced licensing deals with several Indian makers of generic drugs to manufacture lower-cost versions of molnupiravir for developing countries.

The U.S. has agreed to pay roughly \$700 per course of the drug for about 1.7 million treatments. Merck says it plans to use a tiered pricing strategy for developing countries. A review by Harvard University and King’s College London estimated the drug costs about \$18 to make each 40-pill course of treatment.

While other treatments have been cleared to treat COVID-19, including steroids and monoclonal antibodies, those are administered by injection or infusion and are mostly used in hospitals and other health care facilities.

Matthew Perrone reported from Washington.

Follow AP’s pandemic coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/coronavirus-pandemic>

This story has been corrected to show that Merck announced preliminary results in September, not last month.

Today in History

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Nov. 5, the 309th day of 2021. There are 56 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On Nov. 5, 2017, a gunman armed with an assault rifle opened fire in a small South Texas church, killing more than two dozen people; the shooter, Devin Patrick Kelley, was later found dead in a vehicle after he was shot and chased by two men who heard the gunfire. (An autopsy revealed that he died from a self-inflicted gunshot wound.)

On this date:

In 1605, the “Gunpowder Plot” failed as Guy Fawkes was seized before he could blow up the English Parliament.

In 1872, suffragist Susan B. Anthony defied the law by attempting to cast a vote for President Ulysses S. Grant. (Anthony was convicted by a judge and fined \$100, but she never paid the penalty.)

In 1912, Democrat Woodrow Wilson was elected president, defeating Progressive Party candidate Theodore Roosevelt, incumbent Republican William Howard Taft and Socialist Eugene V. Debs.

In 1935, Parker Brothers began marketing the board game “Monopoly.”

In 1968, Republican Richard M. Nixon won the presidency, defeating Democratic Vice President Hubert

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H. Humphrey and American Independent candidate George C. Wallace.

In 1989, death claimed pianist Vladimir Horowitz in New York at age 86 and singer-songwriter Barry Sadler in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, at age 49.

In 1992, Malice Green, a Black motorist, died after he was struck in the head 14 times with a flashlight by a Detroit police officer, Larry Nevers, outside a suspected crack house. (Nevers and his partner, Walter Budzyn, were found guilty of second-degree murder, but the convictions were overturned; they were later convicted of involuntary manslaughter.)

In 1994, former President Ronald Reagan disclosed he had Alzheimer's disease.

In 2003, President George W. Bush signed a bill outlawing the procedure known by its critics as "partial-birth abortion"; less than an hour later, a federal judge in Nebraska issued a temporary restraining order against the ban. (In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Partial Birth Abortion Ban Act.)

In 2006, Saddam Hussein was convicted and sentenced by the Iraqi High Tribunal to hang for crimes against humanity.

In 2007, Hollywood writers began a three-month strike, forcing late-night talk shows to immediately start airing reruns.

In 2009, a shooting rampage at the Fort Hood Army post in Texas left 13 people dead; Maj. Nidal Hasan, an Army psychiatrist, was later convicted of murder and sentenced to death. (No execution date has been set.)

Ten years ago: Former Penn State defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky, accused of molesting eight boys, was arrested and released on \$100,000 bail after being arraigned on 40 criminal counts. (Sandusky was later convicted and sentenced to 30 to 60 years in prison for the sexual abuse of 10 boys over a 15-year period.)

Five years ago: Republican Donald Trump vowed to press into Democratic strongholds over the campaign's final days as Hillary Clinton looked to an army of A-list celebrities and politicians to defend her narrowing path to the presidency. Arrogate overhauled pacesetter California Chrome in the final 100 yards in an upset half-length victory in the \$6 million Breeders' Cup Classic.

One year ago: With Democrat Joe Biden inching closer to victory, President Donald Trump lashed out in a statement from the White House briefing room, insisting that Democrats were trying to "steal the election" with "illegal votes"; there had in fact been no evidence that votes cast illegally were being counted, and no evidence of widespread fraud. ABC, CBS and NBC all cut away from Trump's remarks, with network anchors saying they needed to correct falsehoods being disseminated by the president. Biden appealed for calm as the vote count continued, telling reporters, "The process is working." Facebook banned a large group called "Stop the Steal" that supporters of Trump were using to organize protests against the presidential vote count; some members had called for violence.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Harris Yulin is 84. Actor Chris Robinson is 83. Actor Elke Sommer is 81. Singer Art Garfunkel is 80. Singer Peter Noone is 74. TV personality Kris Jenner is 66. Actor Nestor Serrano is 66. Actor-comedian Mo'Nique is 63. Actor Robert Patrick is 63. Singer Bryan Adams is 62. Actor Tilda Swinton is 61. Actor Michael Gaston is 59. Actor Tatum O'Neal is 58. Actor Andrea McArdle is 58. Rock singer Angelo Moore (Fishbone) is 56. Actor Judy Reyes is 54. Actor Seth Gilliam is 53. Rock musician Mark Hunter (James) is 53. Actor Sam Rockwell is 53. Actor Corin Nemec is 50. Rock musician Jonny Greenwood (Radiohead) is 50. Country singer-musician Ryan Adams is 47. Actor Sam Page is 46. Actor Sebastian Arcelus is 45. Actor Luke Hemsworth is 41. Actor Annet Mahendru (MAH'-hehn-droo) is 36. Rock musician Kevin Jonas (The Jonas Brothers) is 34. Actor Landon Gimenez is 18.